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The Zombi of the British Empire: Rochester's Imperialist Drive in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea

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THE ZOMBI OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE: ROCHESTER'S IMPERIALIST
DRIVE IN CHARLOTTE BROTHNE'S *JANE EYRE* AND
JEAN RHYS' *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Chloe Whitaker
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Accepted by:
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Abstract

This paper examines the character of Rochester as he is presented both in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys' post-colonial response work *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1939). In both works, Rochester is portrayed as the consummate colonist who dominates the women he comes into contact with, metaphorically turning them into his colonized possessions. In order to explore the process of feminine subjugation and colonial mastery, Rhys utilizes the figure of the zombi, a traumatized victim deprived of all free will by a sorcerous bokor who uses the zombi as a source of labor. In this metaphor, scholars and critics like Sarah Juliet Lauro have traditionally seen Rochester as the colonizing-bokor while Jane and Antoinette/Bertha serve as his zombis.

In my reading of Brontë and Rhys' works, I argue that Rochester is also a zombi-figure. He is a colonizer and a bokor, but he is also colonized himself by the idea of Empire. He is turned into a zombi who must fulfill the mandates of British Imperialism without feeling any genuine desire to do so. In this way, Rochester becomes something similar to Homi K. Bhabha's 'mimic men,' men who profess and expand the British Empire without ever being able to fully conform to the identity of a British male. Consequently, Rochester is also unable to fully zombify Jane and Antoinette/Bertha. They resist his control, threatening the stability of the Empire itself.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, David and Lynn. I've had some pretty crazy dreams and schemes over the years, and graduate school was the biggest of them all. You always believed that I could do it. And when I discovered that it was so much more difficult than I thought that it would be, you were there again encouraging me to keep going because you *knew* that I could make it through. You were right in the end. The dream wasn't too big and I could do it, but only because you've been there every step of the way. You've kept me going when I thought I was too tired. You've picked me up when I've been knocked down. This one is for you.

Thank you for keeping me going.

Thank you for starting me dreaming.

Acknowledgments

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To those of you who have supported me in other ways, words cannot express how grateful I am to you. I would especially like to thank Caleb Whitaker for talking through my paper with me. You weren't afraid to challenge me to consider the ramifications of my ideas, and this paper wouldn't have been nearly as good if you hadn't done that. Finally, I would like to thank Emily Boyter for a year of thoughtful conversations and lovely encouragement. You were right – everything turned out just fine.

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The Zombi of the British Empire:

Rochester's Imperialist Drive in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean

Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

I. Introduction

“Is also considered attempt on life by poisoning the use made against a person of substances which, without giving death, will cause a more-or-less prolonged state of lethargy...If the person was buried as a consequence of this state of lethargy, the attempt will be considered murder”

Annotated Haitian Codes, Article 246

Historically, the zombi¹ was not decaying, nor did they roll across continents in a vicious, infectious horde. Rather, the zombi was an individual who had been so thoroughly traumatized by use of magic and potions that they were reduced to mindless laborers entirely at the will of their master, the sorcerous *bokor*. For most, however, the

¹ I choose to use the spelling *zombi* in this paper due to its prevalence throughout Caribbean literature and connection with the Afro-Caribbean religion vodou. While the American *zombie* may refer to the vodou figure, far more often this spelling brings to mind the shambling undead who, while fascinating, are not what I refer to when I say “the zombi of the British Empire.”

² This notion of degrading oneself by marrying outside of Great Britain itself, while common socially (see Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*), was nevertheless destructive from a purely imperial standpoint.

³ From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (1936) respectively.

⁴ It is worth noting at this point, however, that a zombi version of *Jane Eyre* does exist. It's a 1943 film called *I Walked with a Zombie*. Director Val Lewton purportedly gave his

bokor is a figure shrouded in mystery. We're more fascinated by the monster than by its maker. The bokor, however, is the instigator in this relationship. It is perhaps for this reason that the bokor has received such close attention, if not from critics then from policy makers like those behind the 1883 Haitian Criminal Code. While the zombi is a figure worthy of social scorn, it is the bokor who is punished by the law. His shadowy presence was perceived as such a threat that a bokor found responsible for creating a zombi could also be legally called a murderer. When critics do discuss the bokor, it is typically in terms of the colonizer/colonized relationship. Margarite Fernández-Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert note that "the disastrous fate conjured up by the notion of the zombie is symbolic of the Haitian experience of slavery, of the separation of the man from his will, his reduction to a beast of burden at the will of a master" (Fernández-Olmos 153). This understanding of the zombi has allowed writers and thinkers to explore the fallout of the Afro-Caribbean slave trade. However, critics' exploration of this metaphor also tends to flatten the bokor character, who serves as a stand-in for the faceless and dangerous white colonizer.

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) makes extensive use of this metaphor as it explores the relationships between characters created more than 100 years earlier by Charlotte Brontë in her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). Though it was written later, Rhys' novel serves as a post-colonial prelude of sorts to Brontë's story of the young governess Jane who is courted by her wealthy employer, Edward Fairfax Rochester. Set in Jamaica and the British West Indies after the Emancipation Act of 1833, Rhys' novel focuses on the

relationship between Edward Rochester and his first wife, Antoinette (later renamed Bertha) Mason.

Rhys very clearly likens her version of Rochester to the bokor, first by connecting him to the English fascination with Afro-Caribbean occult through his reading of the fictional *The Glittering Coronet of Isles*. Rochester's subsequent exploration of his Caribbean home leads to places connected with the idea of the spirit zombi during his exploration of the ruined priest's house. By the novel's end, Rochester exults in having finally makes Antoinette into a zombi when he declares her to be his "breathless but curiously indifferent" doll (Rhys 171). While Rhys' use of the zombi analogy is drawn from her own experiences in late 19th and early 20th century Dominica, her portrayal of Rochester in the role of colonizer/bokor is hardly without precedent. Brontë herself frequently compares Rochester to a colonizer or a tyrant in *Jane Eyre*, with her eponymous heroine at one point calling him "a sultan" with a "grand Turk's whole seraglio" (Brontë 271-272).

At first glance Rhys' metaphor appears to be straightforward. Rochester is the colonizer/bokor. The women who enter his life, first Antoinette/Bertha and later Jane, are the colonized whom he attempts to make into his zombis. However, far from being the ideal colonizer who embraces his role in the expansion of the British Empire, Edward Rochester is in fact a sort of "problem child" of that same Empire. While he fulfills the role of the colonizer by marrying a Creole woman for her estate, he makes it clear to Jane that he has no real investment in her and consequently no reason to invest in remaking her. "I was sent out to Jamaica, to espouse a bride already courted for me," he tells Jane,

“I never loved, I never esteemed, I did not even know her” (Brontë 309). Instead of colonizing and remaking Bertha into an ideal British wife, Rochester shuts her up and abandons her holdings (which became his property upon their marriage) in Jamaica to roam the continent in search of mistresses. In essence, Brontë’s Rochester withdraws from Empire instead of expanding it. Jean Rhys picks up on this reluctance towards colonization in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by having Rochester repeatedly compose letters to his distant father regarding his marriage to Antoinette. “I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love,” he muses, “I have sold my soul or you have sold it” (Rhys 70). Far from being a one-dimensional bokor, recreating women to match the ideal of British femininity and therefore extending the Empire by creating British heirs, Rochester is actually a reluctant colonist. This raises several questions for readers of both Brontë and Rhys’ novels: what role does Rochester actually fill in the process of colonization and its commonly-used zombification metaphor? And perhaps more importantly, how does the Rochester-figure affect the process of colonization as a whole?

In this paper, I would like to complicate the colonizer/bokor metaphor by suggesting that Rochester is not merely the zombi master, but is also a zombi himself. As Rochester attempts to dominate Antoinette (Brontë’s Bertha) and Jane, removing their wills and controlling their actions, so Rochester himself is being dominated by the ideas of empire, namely the idea that Britain’s sons ought to go forth and colonize the world. Indeed, I argue that Rochester fails to fit into the type of a mere colonizer. As a mere representation of the British colonizer and imperialist, Rochester ought to be a flat character who embraces his role regardless of his individual motives for doing so.

However, Rochester, as he is presented both in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is shown to be reluctant to perform his colonizing duties, first finding it distasteful to degrade himself with his colonial wife² and later finding it dissatisfying to spend time managing his estates in Great Britain.

My purpose in this paper is to allow for a reexamination of Rochester and other literary characters like him, characters like Conrad's Kurtz and Orwell's Burmese police officer³, who resist the simplistic and totalizing definition of "colonizer." By examining how Rochester can function both as colonizer and colonized, as bokor and zombi, one might gain new insights into the imperial system and possibly examine some of the weaknesses inherent in it due to the required presence of Rochester as a colonizing "middle man." Though Rochester strives to perpetuate the system by doing to others what has been done to him, he is ultimately a failure as a colonizer. He is a zombi who cannot perfectly conform to the role set for him. Consequently, Antoinette is able to resist his recreation of her by burning his home and leaping from the roof, while Jane is able to make herself an independent woman who returns to Rochester with a fortune of her own. I'm not arguing that Brontë includes allusions to the zombi figure in her original novel, nor am I trying to create a new version of *Jane Eyre* à la *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies* (2009)⁴. What I am suggesting is that a reading of *Jane Eyre* would benefit from

² This notion of degrading oneself by marrying outside of Great Britain itself, while common socially (see Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*), was nevertheless destructive from a purely imperial standpoint.

³ From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (1936) respectively.

⁴ It is worth noting at this point, however, that a zombi version of *Jane Eyre* does exist. It's a 1943 film called *I Walked with a Zombie*. Director Val Lewton purportedly gave his

keeping the metaphor of the zombi in mind in regards to the power-relationships throughout the novel. While Brontë adapts the institution of slavery as a metaphor for gendered oppression in England, Rhys reclaims the condition of the colonized as worth exploring in and of itself by using a new metaphor, that of the zombi, to explore the power dynamics that exist between the colonized, the old colonizers, and the new colonizers. By examining how the bokor is also the zombi, as I do in this paper, we may also view the characters of Rochester, Bertha, and Jane in entirely new ways.

These colonization attempts are made all the more interesting when viewed in tandem with the historical situation in the British and French colonies of the West Indies. While slavery was a highly lucrative form of production for white slave owners⁵, frequent unrest and oftentimes outright rebellion from the enslaved occupants of the colonies were a fact of life for white colonists. In Jamaica, where *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set, no fewer than five major uprisings occurred between 1760 and 1865, the most famous of which was led by the revered Obeahman Takyi in 1760. These uprisings, though eventually halted by British forces, still served to instill a great deal of fear into the minds of British colonists. This fear was driven into a frenzy when the nearby French colony of Saint Domingue underwent violent revolution in 1791, resulting in the first free black state in the Caribbean – Haiti. While each of these rebellions are worth examining due to their deep connection with the Afro-Caribbean religions and semi-religious figures (like the

screenwriters a copy of *Jane Eyre* and told them to “use the book for the film’s narrative model.” (Bowen). In this film, the Bertha-character is the zombi while the Rochester-character’s mother is the bokor. The movie ends with the deaths of both Bertha and Rochester.

⁵ Some estimates put the annual value of British West Indian exports to be £3 million (£250 million or \$357 million in today’s economy)

zombi), they also find a sort of literary analogy in the works of Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys. As Rochester cannot completely colonize either Antoinette or Jane due to his own status as a zombi middle-man, so white European colonial endeavors are doomed to a failure that is both thorough and violent, utterly destroying the original identity of both the colonizer and the colonized.

II. Slavery, Rebellion, and Revolution

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is set in England sometime during the reign of George III (1760-1820). Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, is set in the late 19th century, after the Emancipation Act of 1833 abolished slavery in all British colonies and promised a financial retribution for slave owners that was never to come. This discrepancy in timelines may perhaps complicate the reading of characters like Rochester, who cross over between both books. What it does not do, however, is discount the West Indian history that both novels observe and draw upon as inspiration from either a temporal or a spatial distance. Brontë's Rochester lives during the time of slave rebellions and revolutions, but for the duration of her novel he can only observe them from the other side of the Atlantic. Their presence lurks on the periphery of his interactions with his wife Bertha and his almost-mistress Jane. For Rhys, the rebellions and revolutions that at one point characterized the West Indies are the stuff of history. Still, such events leave scars on the collective cultural psyche of the West Indies that are felt even in a novel that takes place after their completion.

The British colony of Jamaica, where both Brontë's Bertha and Rhys' Antoinette initially make their home was the site of several major rebellions during Great Britain's possession of the island. Perhaps the most famous was known later as Tacky's War, which began in the early months of 1760 as a series of uncoordinated uprisings across Jamaica. The first of these, located in St. Mary's parish, was led by a, "Koromantyn

negro of the name of Tacky, who had been a chief in Guinea” (Hart 130). Tacky⁶ was a noted practitioner of Obeah. Spurred on by promises of immortality due to fetishes and powders created by Tacky and his fellow Obeahmen, the rebels swept across the Jamaican countryside, successfully raiding Fort Haldane, Heywood Hall Plantation, Esher Plantation, Ballard’s Valley, before finally being stopped by British forces. It took a full year for British forces to restore order in the colony.

Unlike contemporary slave revolts, which were largely local affairs that could be easily put out by governing authorities, the massive scale of Tacky’s War and the aggressive violence of the rebels ensured that it would be months before the uprisings ended and even longer before the terror instilled by the rebel slaves could fade. In his *History of the West Indies* (1793), planter and politician Bryan Edwards suggests that upon arriving at a plantation Tacky and his fellow rebels would round up the white plantation owners and servants only to, “[butcher] every one of them in the most savage manner...In one morning they murdered between 30 and 40 whites and mulattoes, not even sparing infants at the breast” (Edwards 268-269, qtd in Hart 134). This level of violence is common in narratives of slave uprisings throughout the West Indies. None, however, quite match the intensity or cause as severe of ramifications as the rebellion that took place on the nearby colony of Saint Domingue in 1791.

Even though Saint Domingue was French colony and not a British holding, the event that would eventually come to be known as the Haitian Revolution had a profound effect on the psyche of British West Indian slave owners. Many critics and historians

⁶ Tacky is the Anglicized version of the Akan name Takyi.

agree that the revolution itself began in mid to late August during the religious Bois-Caïman ceremony officiated by Boukman Dutty, a vodou priest. Slaves from various plantations and countless countries of origin gathered together for Bois-Caïman, swearing an oath of secrecy and revenge against their masters and providing the 1791 revolution with a crucial factor that earlier rebellions lacked: unity.

Following Bois-Caïman, the rebel slaves made their way across the Northern Province, killing plantation owners and burning property as they went. Within ten days, the entire Northern Province was under their control. Within twenty weeks, rebels controlled one third of the island. Desperate to recover one of their most lucrative foreign holdings, French policy-makers passed a bill in 1792 granting an unprecedented amount of rights to freed people of color. At the same time, the French dispatched troops to restore order on the island. The troops were met with violence both from the rebels within the country and other European forces stationed around the colony. Within a year, their forces were halved and the French Commissioners in charge of the island freed all slaves on Saint Domingue in an attempt to forestall further violence. The rebels attention was diverted from their fight for freedom to a fight against other European powers jockeying for power outside the island. Toussaint Louverture, a black commander, stepped into a position of leadership on the island and in 1801 declared himself to be governor for life. When it became apparent that the French, now under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, intended to reestablish slavery on the island there was another uprising. In 1803 Haitian rebels led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines fought and won the Battle of

Vertières. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines renamed the island Haiti and declared it to be a free republic.⁷

While the Haitian Revolution is certainly remarkable due to its oft-cited status as the only successful slave rebellion in history, what is relevant to this paper is its employment of physical and ideological violence. Historian Laurent Dubois notes that, “violence, in the form of military engagements with French troops and the massacre of white plantation owners and their families, was a central part of the revolution” (Dubois 110), much as Rochester’s failed colonization of Antoinette and Jane results in violent retribution both in Brontë and Rhys’ works. Brutality and mass murder followed the rebels on their march across Haiti. Even when the revolution was over and Dessalines had established himself as leader to the new republic of Haiti, the bloodshed did not stop as Dessalines ordered black occupants of Haiti to massacre any whites remaining on the island. Those few who managed to avoid physical violence soon faced a kind of psychological violence as Dessalines’ constitution declared that all Haitians, regardless of their race, “shall hence forward be known only by the generic appellation of Blacks” (The 1805 Constitution of Haiti. Art. 14). This forcible alteration of identity, violent in its abolition of individuality and any cultural identity outside of the mandates of the state, is strikingly similar to that which was inflicted on the slaves no more than fourteen years earlier. In regards to the system of colonization and slavery as a whole, this violent

⁷ For further discussion on the historical events of these and other slave uprisings in the West Indies, see Richard Hart’s *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery* (2002), Laurent Dubois’ *Avengers of the New World* (2004), and Colin Dayan’s *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (1995). For a collection of contemporary sources and responses to the Haitian Revolution, see Jeremy Popkin’s *You Are All Free* (2010).

deprivation of life and identity suggests that the colonial system's failure and collapse ultimately results only in its own perpetuation. Those who were once colonizers find themselves at the mercy of those that they colonized, their lives marginalized and their identities determined by a group in which they have no voice. Of course, Dessalines' identity-depriving declaration also brings to mind an important figure from both the Haitian revolution and other slave uprisings throughout the West Indies: the soulless and identity-less zombi.

III. Obeah, Vodou, and the Dreaded Zombi

The creole religions of Obeah and Vodou were critical to the success of many slave rebellions throughout the West Indies. Perhaps because of this, many Afro-Caribbean religions became an object of both fascination and dread to Victorian Englishmen and women. Some, like the noted travel writer Sir Spencer St. John, equated Vodou with dangerous barbarism. “There is no subject of which it is more difficult to treat,” writes St. John, “Than Vaudoux worship and the cannibalism which too often accompanies its rites”⁸ (St. John 187). St. John goes on to give his readers a detailed, and no doubt sensationalized, account of the murder and consumption of a young girl in a ritual to satisfy the spirits. His argument that Vodou is analogous with cannibalism and an almost sub-human barbarity encourages British Victorian readers to shun the religion and those who practice it. However, further north in the American city of New Orleans Vodou was viewed with a sort of fascination. In 1872, a reporter from the *New Orleans Times* chronicled his experience of a Vodous ceremony that took place during St. John’s Day. The reporter notes that, “from the indications at one time, the spectators bid fair to outnumber the true believers” (“Making a Night”). While some of the individuals that the reporter encounters are devout adherents looking for the priestess Marie Laveaux, a great

⁸ It is worth noting at this point that St. John’s *Hayti, or the Black Republic* (1884) was printed in two edition. The first was far more explicit in its connection of Vodou and cannibalism, but it was met with widespread consternation and accusations of racism. St. John reprinted the book five years later, tempering his depictions of Vodou but not completely eliminating his conjectures of cannibalism. This quote is taken from the reprint.

many more flock out to the bayou looking for the spectacle associated with the Vodou ritual.

Throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys uses both the creole religion Obeah and the Voudou figure of the zombi as a metaphor for the oppression, both racial and gendered, that her characters face. While it is possible to view this conflation of oppression through the lens of intersectionality (Antoinette's situation is what it is because she is both Creole *and* a woman), one could also successfully argue that Rhys is responding to Brontë's earlier adoption of slavery as a metaphor for female oppression. Brontë uses this metaphor when she has Jane compare herself to a "Turk" (2) and a "rebel slave" (6).

What Rhys does in her novel, then, is apply a pre-existing metaphor to persons for whom it is not entirely metaphorical. Antoinette is white, but as the descendant of a Martiniquean woman of French descent and an original colonist Jamaica, Antoinette is thoroughly creolized both by the former slaves of the island and the second wave of British-born colonists. She is referred to by the former as a "white cockroach" whom "Nobody want" (23). This attitude towards Creole inhabitants of the West Indies is shared by the British, as evidenced in Edward Long's *The History of Jamaica* (1774). In his work on the British colony, Long describes Creole women as "professing some share of vanity and pride....[and] an over-bearing spirit, which...is apt to vent itself in turbulent fits of rage and clamour" (Long 283-284). Long's work takes a patronizing tone towards white Creole women, whose tempers, he argues, are as violent or as languid as the climate and whose mannerisms are often patterned after "Negroe domestics, whose drawling, dissonant gibberish they insensibly adopt, and with it no small tincture of their

awkward carriage and vulgar manners” (Long 278). His ultimate conclusion is that, while they do the best that they can to mimic British manners, they are too far from Great Britain itself to be able to perform anything other than a rough approximation. Consequently, they are oftentimes to be pitied due to their Creole nature. Their manners are too black for them to be accepted by white British society, but their skin color and social status separates them also from the black inhabitants of the British West Indies.

In order to understand the metaphor that Rhys adopts, it is important to first understand what is meant when Rhys discusses Obeah or the zombi in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The set of Creole rituals known as Obeah are thought to have originated with the Akan and Ashanti peoples of the Gold Coast region of Africa. Resettled and forced to labor in the strenuous and life-threatening sugar plantations of Jamaica and Barbados, many Ashanti slaves turned to their ancestral religion as a form of release. The Ashanti, in addition to being known as Obeah practitioners, had a reputation for being “freedom fighters in the British colonies” (Murrell 230). Obeah became a unifying factor for the displaced and increasingly disparate groups of rebellious slaves during the initial colonization of the British Caribbean, especially throughout Jamaica, providing them with “at least an illusion of autonomy as well as a familiar method of access to the world of the spirits, a measure of social control and medical care” (Fernández-Olmos 156). Obeahmen⁹ initially served as community leaders, exercising their power to maintain social order amongst their fellow slaves, much as Antoinette notes that Rochester uses

⁹ This term, Nathaniel Murrell notes, is not gender specific. While some critics will differentiate between Obeahmen and Obeahwomen, Murrell notes that actual adherents to Obeah will use the word ‘Obeahmen’ to refer to spiritual leaders of both sexes. Obeah does feature a comparatively large percentage of female leadership.

Obeah to exercise colonial control over her in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As the brutal working conditions escalated, however, many prominent Obeahmen used their influence to become more than community leaders. The frequent Jamaican slave revolts of the 18th and 19th centuries almost all featured Obeahmen as prominent leaders, including Tacky's War.

While Akan and Ashanti slaves used Obeah to fuel their rebellions across the British West Indies, slaves of the neighboring French island Saint Domingue were using another Creole religion, Vodou, to stir up a revolution. Bois Caïman was meant to, "serve the spirits and fortify the commitment to revolt" (Naimou 173). Galvanized by this ceremony, slaves across the island rose up against their former masters. As the revolution swept across the nation, violent and unstoppable, Vodou "became the symbol of Haitian autonomy and nationalism" (Murrell 63).

Though Obeah is by far the most commonly discussed religion in Rhys' text, it is coupled throughout the text with the notion of the Vodou zombi. While the term finds its origins in the soul-capture myths of the Ivory Coast, which feature spirits without bodies, in the West Indies the term took on the additional meaning of a body without a soul. A zombi is created when a bokor creates a concoction of herbs to poison an individual, giving that individual the appearance of death. Later, after the supposed body is disposed of (sometimes even buried), the bokor administers an antidote to reanimate the poisoned individual. The resulting trauma suffered by the individual means that the bokor has complete control over the victim, reducing the zombi to a mere object of labor. This process is analogous to the creation of a slave, so much so that the process of

zombification in contemporary Vodou is reserved for only the worst of criminals. It taps deep into the cultural history of a country born from a slave revolution, reenacting the capture and eventual reduction of men to identity-less tools for labor.

However, the bokor figure is also somewhat of a paradox. While the bokor certainly can (and frequently is) read as a stand-in for the white colonizer, the figure's origins are decidedly Afro-Caribbean. Consequently, simple one-to-one correlation between the bokor and the colonizer is impossible because the bokor is also a symbol of revolt *against* the colonizer. In vodou tradition the bokor is a servant of the Lwa, vodou spirits that exist between a supreme creator and humanity. The implements that the bokor employs (herbs and poisons) are the very same implements used to ferment slave rebellions during the 18th and 19th centuries. Several of those slave rebellions featured a bokor in some type of leadership role. The fact that the bokor also serves as a stand-in for the white colonist both in sociological studies and literary studies is a perplexing fact that is nevertheless acknowledged as truth by those who have studied the figure. Ennis Edmonds summarizes it best when he states that the bokor, “practices with ‘both hands,’ doing both good and evil” (Edmonds 125).

Haitian Vodou and Jamaican Obeah are often discussed in tandem both in Victorian accounts and contemporary literature and criticism. Rhys uses both Obeah and the zombi-figure in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as not unrelated metaphors for colonial oppression. Furthermore, such scholars as Sarah Juliet Lauro note that in the Caribbean the notion of raising the dead by means of potions or poisons is not isolated to the practice of Vodou. In fact, in his *History of Jamaica* (1774), Edward Long notes that

Obeahmen (or “Myal Men” as they were sometimes also called), were able to induce, “a deathlike state that is later removed, effectively giving the appearance that the witch doctors...were capable of bringing the dead back to life” (Lauro 46). The connection between Obeah and Vodou exists, especially in Victorian attitudes towards the dangers of the slave religions.

In Rhys’ case, the combination of Obeah and Vodou creates a mixed metaphor that unites diverse people groups in order to create a unified narrative of oppression and resistance. However, her use of the zombi affects the metaphor in interesting ways. The zombi, as Lauro notes, is far from a static character. It represents both, “the disempowered slave-in-chains and the powerful slave-in-revolt” (Lauro 10). On the one hand, the zombi is a reanimated tool to be used by their masters in order to create a type of organic industrial machine, much like slave labor on a plantation. On the other hand, however, the worker who views themselves as already dead has very little left to lose. Lauro traces the delicate relationship between disempowerment and desperation through the history of Saint Dominugue, culminating finally in the adoption of the zombi by Haitian Revolutionaries as a symbol behind which they might fight. Contemporary accounts of the Haitian Revolution emphasize the inhumanness of the rebel slaves: they were superhumanly immune to bullets, to fear, to death itself. Alternately, the rebels were also subhuman: vicious, bloodthirsty “cannibals” (Dalmás) and “tigers” (Descourtilz)(Lauro 60-61).

In adopting the zombi as a metaphor for female and racial subjugation, then, Rhys is implying that such forms of subjugation contain the potential for explosive failure. In

the case of Antoinette, this is certainly true; both Brontë's and Rhys' novels end Antoinette's story with her burning of Thornfield. Rochester's domination of Jane similarly fails. Though Jane neither harms him physically nor destroys his livelihood, when she returns to him, she is in the position of dominance over a man who is blind, lame, and broken.

IV. The Colonizer as Bokor

Before Rochester can be examined as the zombi, he is the bokor of Rhys' and Brontë's novels. In doing so, Rochester inhabits a character that is socially and historically perceived both as an incarnation of white oppression and black rebellion. The bokor as the white colonizer is easiest to see. In many respects, Rochester's relationship to the female characters both in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set up as a typical colonizer/colonized relationship. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë frequently uses colonization as a metaphor for the male/female relationship in Imperial Britain. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the relationship is less subtle. Rochester arrives in Jamaica as a colonizer coming into the colonized country¹⁰. His acquisition of Antoinette's land and person are acts of colonization in the most obvious way, and his destruction of Antoinette results in her becoming his "doll," a term also used to describe the engaged Jane in Brontë's work that harkens back to the notion of the zombi as an empty vessel at the whim of the evil bokor.

Rochester's colonization of Jane seems almost nonsensical at first. Unlike Antoinette, Jane is a British woman born and raised in England itself. However, Jane's ambiguous social position as a governess and her rebellious personality mark her as "other" in regards to Rochester's status as a member of the landed gentry. Throughout

¹⁰ In her article "Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" Susan Meyer notes the colonial portrayal of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, along with its problematic prioritizing of gender over race. Carine Mardorossian traces a similar pattern through *Wide Sargasso Sea* in her book *Reclaiming Difference*, though she sees Rochester's colonialist assumptions as ultimately failing to constrain Antoinette.

Jane Eyre, Jane maintains an air of separation from the upper class society in which she finds herself after losing her parents at a young age. Amongst her blood relations, the Reeds, she is prevented from joining in the opening familial vignette due, ostensibly, to her failure to, “acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition” (1). In Lowood, she is made an example of during Brockelhurst’s initial visit when she is denounced as a liar, whom the students are all encouraged to, “be on your guard against...shun her example” (64). By the time that she arrives in Thornfield to serve as that house’s resident governess, Jane has become adept at separating herself from social situations due to her own ambiguously liminal social standing. She is not of the lower working class, and so cannot interact with any degree of familiarity with the servants. However, as she is employed by Rochester she cannot freely enter into his society, which is composed primarily of independently wealthy landed gentry. When in the presence of Rochester and his company, she chooses to seat herself away from the group as a whole. She lurks in window seats and cloisters herself away behind curtains. She is never part of the party who occupy Rochester’s house – she exists primarily to serve them by occupying and educating Rochester’s young French ward, Adele.

This “otherness” is noted and exploited by Rochester upon his arrival at Thornfield. His initial reaction to Jane is to liken her to a fairy, one of the “men in green” (122). In doing so, he establishes her as something other than a being to whom one might relate on a human level as equal British citizens. Jane’s response to this assertion, exacerbates the metaphor of inhumanness, adding a touch of the colonized to even the quintessentially British fairy. “The men in green all forsook England a hundred years

ago,” says Jane, “I don’t think either summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more” (Brontë 122). This statement implies that the fairies, and Jane by proxy, all belong to an old Britain that no longer exists. The ascent of the Imperial drive in Great Britain has wiped them out and Jane, the indigenous Turk, their last scion, is left to be dominated by imperial masculinity. In this way Jane, who as a British woman ought to be concerned with spreading the Empire through child-making or soul making¹¹ instead becomes the object of Rochester’s imperial drive as he attempts to make her into an image of the ideal Victorian woman. Though Jane is quintessentially British, she is not Imperial as Rochester is and therefore she falls into the category of the Other whom Spivak argues must be, “[made] into a human so that [she] can be treated as an end in [herself]” (Spivak 248).

Dominate Rochester does. As the novel progresses, he treats her less and less like his employee and more and more like a kind of slave. The style of Jane’s first person narration serves to reinforce this identification. As Julia Lee notes, “with its emphasis on literacy, its teleological journey from slavery to freedom, and its ethics of resistance over submission, *Jane Eyre* borrows many of the generic features of the slave narrative” (Lee 29). Throughout the narrative, Jane reinforces the role of slave foisted on her by those who surround her so that her own self-narrative becomes a story of resistance and escape. Rochester’s interactions with Jane enforce the necessity of resistance. The first instance of this alarming treatment comes when Jane is recalled to Gateshead to attend to her

¹¹ In “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” Gayatri Spivak argues that a Victorian woman’s two greatest projects are that of sexual reproduction (child making) and the humanizing of the heathen “Others”, soul making (Spivak 248).

dying aunt. When she refuses to accept his gift of fifty pounds he responds by giving her a ten pound note, five less than she is due in wages:

‘Right, right! Better not give you all now. You would, perhaps, stay away three months if you had fifty pounds. There are ten: is it not plenty?’ ‘Yes, sir, but now you owe five.’ ‘Come back for it then: I am your banker for forty pounds.’

(Brontë 226).

When Jane counters by proclaiming her intention to find another situation elsewhere, Rochester tries to renege on even this agreement, asking Jane to “give me back nine pounds, Jane; I’ve a use for it” (Brontë 227). By refusing to give Jane the wages that she has earned, Rochester actively lowers Jane’s social status. She is no longer his employee, who can expect fair compensation for her services. Instead, Rochester places himself in a position where he can expect her to fulfill his desires by strictly controlling her means. At this point in the novel, Jane has no one in the world who will provide for her save herself. Rochester is able to use his money as a way to domineer her, mirroring the master/slave or colonizing-bokor/zombi relationship, albeit to a lesser degree.

As Rochester and Jane’s relationship develops, the colonizing-bokor/zombi relationship grows stronger as Rochester begins to remake Jane as his ideal English zombi bride. This remaking robs Jane of all agency, until she describes herself as Rochester’s “doll” (Brontë 271), much as Antoinette is described as Rochester’s doll near the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As Rochester costumes Jane in fine fabric and jewels, she draws allusions between his demeanor and that of an Eastern slave owner. “He smiled,”

she says, “And I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched” (Brontë 271). Rochester perpetuates this allusion only a page later when he tells Jane: “when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just – figuratively speaking – attach you to a chain like this’ (touching his watch-guard). ‘Yes, “bonny wee thing, I’ll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne” (Brontë 273). To Rochester, Jane is a jewel. However, though this comparison is initially flattering, it ultimately reduces Jane to an inanimate piece of finery herself, soulless and heartless.

Though Rochester insists that Jane’s work as a governess is a kind of slavery, the control that he exerts over her after their engagement is even more so. Under his firm hand Jane’s visible personality, her tastes in dress and her disdain for glittering finery, is broken apart. When the two visit a jeweler’s shop, Jane notes that, “the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation” (Brontë 271). Though he does not use her for hard labor, Rochester’s reconstruction of Jane can easily be compared to Antoinette’s figurative zombification in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She becomes Rochester’s object, unrecognizable even to herself as Rochester the bokor attempts to remove from Jane her very soul. She is remade into the very image of Imperial British femininity, garbed in fabrics imported from distant lands and bejeweled in wealth gained through imperial holdings. Rochester as the colonizing-bokor attempts to zombify his bride to conform to the ideas of empire. Though Jane attempts to resist this zombification by refusing to give up her duties as a governess and refusing to identify herself as Mrs. Rochester until after the marriage, this resistance is short-lived. As she leaves the house

on the day of their wedding, she pauses to glance in the mirror only to see, “a robed and veiled figure, so unlike myself that it seemed almost the image of a stranger” (Brontë 290). It could be argued that by marrying Jane, Rochester intends to completely separate Jane from her will. Indeed, when the wedding is interrupted, Jane notes that Rochester, “without seeming to recognize in me a human being, he only twined my waist with his arm, and riveted me to his side” (Brontë 293). He colonizes her, viewing her as less than human and attempting to make her into a British zombi who might perpetuate the Empire by safeguarding Rochester’s British home and providing him with British heirs.

After the wedding is interrupted, however, Rochester’s status as bokor shifts. He moves from being a colonizing-bokor, concerned with breaking the colonized zombi in order to remake her into a mirror of imperial femininity, to inhabiting the space traditionally occupied by an Afro-Caribbean bokor whose aim is to use his zombis to destroy imperial tenants. As a rebellious bokor, Rochester attempts to take Jane away to France to become his mistress, corrupting traditional English values and perverting what ought to be the home’s sacred moral center: his young fiancée. Every attempt Rochester makes to colonize Jane after the wedding is an attempt at dismantling the very system that the colonizing-bokor ought to promote, though his attempts to forcibly make Jane his mistress ensure that he remains a rebellious-bokor all the same.

As the novel progresses, readers become aware that this is not the first time that Rochester has colonized a woman. His first wife, Bertha Antoinetta Mason, is kept locked in a cell in the attic because she failed to conform to Rochester’s standards of British femininity. “Her character ripened and developed with frightening rapidity,”

Rochester tells Jane, “Her vices sprang up fast and rank...Bertha Mason – the true daughter of an infamous mother – dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste” (Brontë 310). Rochester’s choice of words here hearken back to Edward Long’s depictions of the wild and passionate Creole woman, especially one of mixed race and tainted blood. However, the term ‘unchaste’ need not necessarily mean unfaithful. Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary defines unchaste as “lascivious...inclined to lust, lewd, wanton” (*OED* “Unchaste” “Lascivious”). By describing Bertha as unchaste, Rochester could also be describing Bertha as a woman who gains enjoyment from sex, even sex within the bounds of matrimony, a forbidden pleasure typically enjoyed by Imperial Men and not their pure, angelic counterparts.

In their book *Madwoman in the Attic* (1980), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that Bertha functions as, “Jane’s dark double *throughout* the governess’s stay at Thornfield. Specifically, every one of Bertha’s appearances – or more accurately, her manifestations – has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane’s part” (Gilbert 360). This doubling effect gives credence to my assertion that Jane is being colonized by Rochester, much as her dark double has been colonized before the events of the novel. Furthermore, Jane’s initial confusion over Bertha’s apparel – “I know not what dress she had on...whether gown, sheet, or shroud” (Brontë 286) – suggests that both Jane and Bertha’s weddings can be interchanged with the image of a funeral, and their subsequent state as Rochester’s things likened to their zombi status when Rochester, their bokor, raises them from the dead.

Gilbert and Gubar's reading of Bertha fails, as noted by critics like Carine Mardorossian and Carolyn Vellenga-Berman, in their lack of attention to Bertha as her own unique character in the novel. Under their reading, Bertha is reduced to a thing much as Rochester attempts to demote Jane to a thing when he marries her. Perhaps her ultimate end that ensures Jane's lasting happiness makes such a reading tempting, but to relegate Bertha to such a role undermines her own agency and accomplishments in the text. As a colonized woman and a zombi, Bertha has her own arc both in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys' companion work *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Rhys' work begins by establishing Bertha, here renamed Antoinette, as a Creole woman living in Jamaica in the British West Indies in the late 1830's, shortly after the Emancipation Act freed all slaves in the colonies and sunk many plantation owners into abject poverty. As the daughter of a former plantation owner, Antoinette exists in a liminal position in West Indian society. She is most certainly not a member of the newly emancipated working class. However, her family's loss of income after the emancipation guarantees that she is no longer a member of the island's upper class. Her friend Tia draws attention to Antoinette's poverty by comparing her to the new wave of British colonists arriving in Jamaica post-emancipation: "Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money...Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (Rhys 24). Antoinette is a Creole woman in the worst sense of the word. She is financially defunct and unsocialized (to use Long's description of white Creole women raised amongst black West Indians).

When Rochester arrives in the West Indies, Antoinette's liminal position allows him to treat her as a colonizer would treat those he colonizes. Mary Louise Pratt describes this phenomenon as the "contact zone" which is, "a space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographical and historically separated come into contact with each other...usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 6). Though Antoinette's liminal position connects her to Rochester, it also separates them in such a way that Rochester can purchase her, for lack of a better term, upon the event of their marriage. Antoinette's Aunt Cora describes the marriage as "handing over everything the child owns to a perfect stranger" (Rhys 114). Though Cora attempts to obtain some legal protection for Antoinette, her goal is thwarted by Antoinette's step-brother Richard Mason. When the marriage takes place, Antoinette loses control over the little that had formally been her property. The law, which Christophine notes earlier is employed as a new means of enslaving the local population, guarantees that Rochester's wife can never leave him. "I am not rich now," Antoinette explains to Christophine, "I have no money of my own at all, everything I own belongs to him" (Rhys 110). When Christophine hears this, she suggests that Antoinette run away. However, Antoinette lingers. Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert notes that this situation resonates as a theme in many of Rhys' works: "That women lack control over their own fortunes and how this lack of control victimizes them and deprives them of self-determination" (Paravisini-Gebert 199). Rochester capitalizes on this lack of control by depriving Antoinette of her family estate at Granbois and her inherited money (much like he

deprives Jane of her wages in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*), consequently, removing almost all of Antoinette's legal agency.

Rochester is not content, however, to merely control Antoinette's financial situation. After the marriage he attempts to deprive her of all free will as well, playing the part of the colonizer-bokor again while treating her as a possession without any inherent rights. He begins by using her to gratify his physical desire until he, "was exhausted [and] turned away from her and slept, still without a word or a caress" (Rhys 93). This physical attraction is not equated with any genuine feelings for Antoinette, nor does it result in him treating her well after being gratified. "I did not love her," Rochester states, "I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me" (Rhys 93) When he tires of her, Rochester chooses to ignore Antoinette entirely. She is little more than a thing to him, a warm body whose exertion gives him pleasure when he wants it and whom he can store away in the meantime with little physical provision and no emotional connection.

Rochester's right to colonize Antoinette stems, in part, from the hierarchical system of race and class that existed throughout the British West Indies which Paravisini-Gebert describes as "pigmentocracy, with those of lighter skin nearer the top of the social pyramid (and with whites at the very top), while the black masses occupied the lowest positions" (Paravisini-Gebert 2). Rochester, by virtue of his recent arrival from England, is the 'whitest' character in the novel. Antoinette, the daughter of colonists of both English and French descent and who has never even seen England, is seen by Rochester as belonging to a lower social class than he. He feels insulted when Antoinette initially

refuses to capitulate to his will and marry him. “I did not relish going back to England in the role of the rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl,” Rochester recounts, “I must know why” (Rhys 78). In order to save face, Rochester exhibits the cunning of the new British colonists and allays Antoinette’s fears regarding their union, promising that their relationship will be an exchange of trust. “Don’t you remember last night I told you that when you are my wife there would not be any more reason to be afraid?” he asks her, “I’ll trust you if you’ll trust me” (Rhys 78-79).

In dealing with Antoinette after their marriage, however, Rochester finds himself confronted with a passionate woman with whom he never quite knows what to do.

Michelle Cliff describes the character as presented in *Jane Eyre* to be a wild woman:

the woman whose fury implodes, the woman who is defined from the outside, who acceding to that foreign definition cannot be whole, whose dark blood is the source of her betrayal and constant danger (Cliff 42).

Cliff’s reading of Bertha suggests that her blood is ‘tainted’ by more than simply time spent in the West Indies, that Bertha is of mixed race passing as white while never quite being able to fit into white British culture. The idea of British womanhood foisted upon her does not conform to her own passionate state of being, and so Bertha is broken apart under the strain.

Rhys’ Antoinette channels a similar passion. She feels deeply the beauty of Granbois, her home. She loves Rochester passionately and desires for him to love her in the same way. Rochester feels that he can never bring such a creature back to England, save as a spectacle, so he strives to remake her, breaking her spirit in the way of a

colonizer-bokor by raising her back to life like a Vodou zombi of the ideal British woman. First comes the killing, performed upon the consummation of their marriage. Antoinette segues into the act by musing on her childhood desire for death. "Say die and I will die," she tells Rochester, to which he responds, "Die then! Die...I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers" (Rhys 92). While Antoinette refers to a literal death, Rochester repeatedly subjects her to a metaphorical death as he uses her to satisfy his sexual desires and watches her climax again and again. On a practical level, Rochester and Antoinette's frequent copulation serves to bind Antoinette to what quickly becomes a source of pleasure for her. This hearkens back to the assertion Brontë's Rochester makes about his first wife being "unchaste." Although Antoinette is experiencing sex within the confines of marriage, there is no mention of procreation in Rhys' novel, only Antoinette's physical enjoyment. On a metaphorical level, however, the comparison drawn between sex and death reminds readers of the first step in the zombification process. Antoinette is killed then raised to life again at the whim of her British bokor. This process is finished after Antoinette and Rochester's final romantic encounter. Still groggy from the Obeah potion that Antoinette obtained from her nursemaid Christophine and used to lure him into bed, Rochester, "drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl" (Rhys 138). All traces of intimacy vanish after this final encounter. Rochester becomes more adamant in his destruction of Antoinette, reshaping her without second thought.

Once Antoinette is raised, Rochester gradually reworks her into the image of British womanhood. He rechristens her Bertha, "because it's a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha" (Rhys 135). While Antoinette is a French name that brings

up memories of Antoinette's foreign and insane lineage¹², the moniker Bertha has its origins in Germanic and English names. Antoinette later resists, arguing that, "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 147). By controlling her name, Rochester is attempting to control her personality. He is remaking her into his zombi, an animated creature devoid of any internal life, a body with no soul but that of the master. As they leave Granbois, Rochester notes the process to be complete. Antoinette's face is blank, "no expression at all...I knew that my dreams were her dreams" (Rhys 166-7). By the end of the novel, passionate Antoinette has become Rochester's "breathless but curiously indifferent" doll (Rhys 171), a zombi in the truest sense of the word. He ignores her socially, abuses her sexually, and has dominated her will to the point that it appears to no longer exist. He is the ultimate bokor, in complete control of his living corpse.

This control, however, quickly reveals itself to be an illusion in both of Rochester's relationships. Though Rochester initially experiences success in dominating both Jane and Bertha, he can never fully make them conform to the image of British-ness. Both Jane and Antoinette/Bertha resist his control, in the manner of the slaves brought to the West Indies to labor on the plantations. Jane, who initially describes herself as a sort of "rebel slave," teases Rochester so as to avoid fulfilling his will. When it becomes

¹² It is a diminutive of Annette, her mad mother's name. While Rochester frequently asserts that Antoinette's madness is inherited from her mother, Rhys' narrative suggests that this madness is greatly exacerbated, if not caused outright, by Annette's sudden change in social standing post-emancipation. While she is always distant from Antoinette, it is only after losing all of the trappings of her former life and status – her husband, Coulibri, her son and the heir to the estate – that she completely breaks down. It is suggested that the fact that she is 'institutionalized' in a house where she is repeatedly raped contributes to her madness as well.

clear, however, that he means to press her into acting out the part of his mistress in spite of her own desires, she flees into the wilderness, seeking shelter in the moors, much like the escaped slaves and maroons sought shelter in the West Indian wilderness. “No tie holds me to human society at this moment...” Jane recounts after leaving Thornfield, “I struck straight into the heath” (Brontë 327). Jane’s assertion that she needs no human company exacerbates her own inhumanness and lends credence to her status as a zombi-in-revolt. However, the fact that she subsequently creates a new society with the Rivers sisters, who exist in the same liminal social position as she does, suggests that Jane is ultimately able to redefine her status as a strength and a way to gain some measure of freedom.

Antoinette’s resistance is more overt. She first attempts to use an Obeah potion on Rochester, petitioning Christophine for a potion that can, “make people love or hate. Or...or die” (Rhys 112). When this doesn’t work, Antoinette reacts to Rochester’s domineering with violence. Ultimately, Rhys’ Antoinette follows in the footsteps of Brontë’s Bertha with outright rebellion, torching the symbols of her master’s power by burning down his house.¹³ Her death becomes a final act of agency or, as Lauro puts it, “as embracing death in an act of rebellion” (Lauro 53). As a colonizer and a bokor, Rochester is a failure. Even though the narrative ends with Bertha’s death and Rochester’s marriage to Jane, both women’s final acts contain the agency that they deprive Rochester of. While zombified Bertha is deanimated through her death, she

¹³ The torching of Rochester’s house and Antoinette’s dreamlike return to Jamaica highlight what Lauro notes as another types of zombi figure – the soul without a body, freed at last from bodied captivity to fly back to the motherland

destroys Rochester's house on her way out. When Jane returns to Rochester, she has a fortune of her own and becomes his caretaker, controlling his access to the world. The codependency of the colonizer/colonized relationship means that, "the occupier himself is colonized by the experience of colonialism" (Lauro 13). The process works backwards to affect the colonizer, Rochester, in negative ways. This notion that he is himself colonized, however, leads to interesting assertions regarding his status in Rhys' zombi/bokor metaphor. Far from being solely an agent responsible for the creation of zombis, I would argue that Rochester is also a zombi himself.

V. The Zombi of the British Empire

Rhys' novel establishes the pattern for Rochester's zombification. During the first part of the novel, it is made clear that he travels to Jamaica, marries Antoinette, and settles in Granbois not for his own sake, but rather to appease his father's will. As a second son, Rochester has little in the way of financial options. He has no inheritance either in land or titles. "Dear Father," he thinks as he muses on his marriage, "I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love...I have sold my soul or you have sold it" (Rhys 70). Rochester is little more than expendable labor, sent to extend the property for the primary benefit of his older brother who remains in England. His status as property is exacerbated by the fact that Rochester is suffering from a fever while the marriage is being arranged. His own opinions and desires matter so little in the arrangement that the fact that he is not in his right mind during negotiations is of little to no effect. The expression "selling one's soul," functions on two levels here. First and foremost, it functions as a familiar expression that conveys the fact that Rochester's situation has privileged some tangible gain over his own desires. On another level, though, it harkens back to one of the primal roots of the zombi myth: that of African soul-capture in which a man's soul is separated from his body and then sold as a source of power. Rochester's sold soul cements English dominance abroad in the newly emancipated Jamaica.

Deprived of his own will and soul, Rochester becomes an object for furthering the Imperial mission. He feels no passion in his dealings with his wife. "I did not love her,"

he says, “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 93). Yet despite any and all apathy that Rochester feels towards his wife as a person, he proceeds to dominate her in the way he feels he is supposed to dominate the Creoles of the West Indies. He forces her to marry him, because as an Englishman he cannot be rejected by a Creole woman. “I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl,” he muses (Rhys 78). He is driven by the expectations of a nameless and faceless society in Great Britain. Consequently, Rochester renames her Bertha not as a term of endearment but rather because he likes to think of a proper English woman as the wife to a proper English man, as opposed to the half-French Creole that his wife truly is. Near the end of the novel, he determines to lock her up so that he might be the only one to possess her. “Made for loving?” he thinks, “Yes, but she’ll have no lover, for I don’t want her and she’ll see no other...She’s mad, but *mine, mine*” (Rhys 165-6). He possesses her, but his shame at her madness and his refusal to be her lover shows that he takes no pleasure in the possession. Rochester is a zombi whose own will has been replaced by the compulsion to toil.

If Rochester is a zombi, his bokor is no less than the idea of empire instilled in him by his father and brother. His actions are motivated not by a particular set of feelings towards a person or place, but rather by a sense of what British society expects from him. This behavior is reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s discussion on mimic men, “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals, and in

intellect” (Bhabha 124-125)¹⁴. The colonized Indians do as they are told in order to appear British, though they never really are. They become puppets, zombies, acting out the part of their British colonizers even though they can never truly become them. Michelle Cliff describes this same phenomenon in her discussion of colonized children, who “represent the colonizer’s world, peddle the colonizer’s values, ideas, notions of what is real, alien, other, normal, supreme...[they] speak, albeit in a tongue she/he does not own. It is the King’s, Queen’s” (Cliff 40). In this scenario, Rochester functions as the second person in the colonizer/colonized relationship. He must learn how to mimic the ideal British man, the colonizer who is always in control of the situation, as he spreads Britain abroad.

Rochester is a British colonist, not one of the colonized, yet his cleverly-constructed social identity mirrors that of the colonized mimic men. He travels to Jamaica to marry Antoinette, not of his own choice, but rather because his father and brother deem it to be the proper course of action for a younger son. He acts out the role of the British patriarchy even though he doesn’t feel it. This can be seen in the frequent revisions to the mental letters he composes for his father, first accusing him of having “sold [Rochester’s] soul”, but later editing the letter so that it merely reads “All is well and has gone according to your plans and wishes” (Rhys 75). Rochester’s final letter to his father contains none of his original malice or more honest musings, only an expressed desire to act as he has been told. Any expressions of unique desires or personhood is

¹⁴ Somewhere around here we can talk about Burmese days briefly – the hyper-British British man abroad connects the colonized mimic man with the white colonizer’s actions.

edited out – as Rochester fulfills his father's wishes he finds that he no longer has any soul for it.

Like the Indian mimic men, who were condemned to be “almost the same but not white” (Bhabha 128), never British enough, Rochester cannot achieve acceptance in society by denying himself as acting the role of the proper British man. The black residents of Granbois have no respect for him. Characters like Amélie laugh at his attempts to make himself more English. “I could feel his dislike and contempt,” Rochester writes of one of the servants, “The same contempt as that devil's when she said, ‘Taste my bull's blood’” (Rhys 167), referring to Christophine's description of her superior coffee. When his marriage to Antoinette is revealed to be a sham conducted between himself and a woman he views as insane, Rochester decides to return to England no longer pretending that the marriage is meaningful to him. “If I was bound for hell let it be hell,” he declares, “No more false heavens” (Rhys 170). Antoinette, still legally his wife but no longer acting the part fulfilling her wifely duties of household management, is locked up in the attic while Rochester travels through Europe, living however he desires.

Brontë's text expands upon Rochester's reluctance to enact the tenants of Imperialism. He refuses to remain in Britain in order to build up his estate and its holdings. His ward Adèle complains “I never see him” (Brontë 103), while the housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane, “I believe he is considered a just and liberal landlord amongst his tenants: but he has never lived much amongst them...he has travelled a great deal and seen a great deal of the world” (Brontë 104). He is not among his own people

enough to be acquainted with their ways or serve as a safeguard to their lifestyle. Instead, he spends copious amounts of time in Europe, “reluctantly” taking on the role of the libertine with women like the French singer Celine Varrens and her two successors, “an Italian, Giacinta, and a German Clara; both considered singularly handsome” (Brontë 315). He even goes so far as to bring the Continent into what ought to be the sacred British home when he sends Adèle Varrens (with whom he claims he has no blood connection) to Thornfield. While Rochester’s actions do not cause him to lose face in society (he is careful to keep his mad wife locked out of sight), his dismantling of Britain at home instead of his spreading of Britain abroad showcase the potential for mutiny inherent in all zombi figures. He will not remain a zombi who obeys. Rochester had been broken by the idea of Empire when he married Bertha. Though he initially tries to reenact the Imperial drive by zombifying Jane as an ideal British bride, this renewed drive to colonize and recreate the British empire abroad is tainted by the fact that British anti-bigamy laws condemn his actions. When his ruse falls apart, Rochester fights to keep Jane as his mistress with few, if any, reservations. He is a vicious, violent man with nothing to lose¹⁵, even going so far as to threaten sexual violence against Jane. His zombi-like inhumanness becomes a form of strength as he resists social expectations

¹⁵ In *Imperial Masochism*, John Kucich notes that there are several reasons why men of Empire might capitalize on their painful past experiences. His assertions that martyrdom furthered the religious motivation for colonization are more applicable to St. John than Rochester, who might be considered as a different type of bokor in a different type of paper. However, Kucich does note at one point that stories of the violence done to British citizens by those abroad was, “a means of legitimating aggression and inspiring vengeance” (7). This particularly resonates with Rochester’s justification for his attempted bigamy and lends interesting credence to his threat to Jane – “Jane! will you hear reason?” (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear) ‘because if you won’t I’ll try violence’” (306).

without fear of repercussions. After Jane leaves, he forgoes even the crudest actions of the British gentility and “broke off acquaintance with all the gentry, and shut himself up, like a hermit, at the Hall” (Brontë 436).

As Rochester’s own status as a zombi of the British Empire begins to turn against itself, his attempted zombification of Jane and Bertha breaks down completely. Jane flees to the north where she remakes herself as Jane Elliott. Upon receiving her inheritance from her uncle, Jane sets up a non-traditional household by sharing her wealth amongst her cousins. “I have never had a home,” Jane declares to St. John upon receiving word of her inheritance, “I have never had brother or sisters; I must and will have them now” (Brontë 393). Jane’s declaration forcefully rewrites the identities of the Rivers siblings in relationship to herself, mirroring the bokor/zombi relationship that she had previously been subject to yet recasting herself in the bokor role. Much like Dessalines’ declaration that all inhabitants of Haiti, regardless of their race, were to consider themselves black, Jane declares that all members of the Rivers household are to consider themselves her siblings and equals in her inheritance. And so they become, based on her declaration and generosity alone, despite perhaps St. John’s distinctly un-brotherly intentions towards Jane. This declaration is eventually put to the test when she refuses to partake in the traditional feminine role of Imperialism (soul making *and* child making) by refusing to marry St. John, opting instead to remain in the non-traditional household she created with his sisters.

The breakdown of Bertha’s zombification is far more violent. Bertha, locked in the attic for so many years, escapes in the dead of night and burns Thornfield, the

Rochester family home and the tangible representation of the British Imperial drive, to the ground. Brontë's account of this event focuses on Rochester and his reaction to his wife's pyromania and subsequent suicide.

“He went up to the attic,” the inn keeper recounts for Jane, “I witnessed, and several more witnessed Mr. Rochester ascend through the skylight on to the roof: we heard him call ‘Bertha!’ We saw him approach her; and then, ma’am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement” (Brontë 426)

This is the last mention that is made of Bertha before the story returns to recounting Rochester's subsequent sorrows. Rhys, however, rewrites the events from Antoinette's point of view. She remains the zombi figure, a stranger to herself when she sees her reflection in the mirror. However, her final leap from the ramparts is not in despair or defeat. “But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri,” she states, “Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated she laughed” (Rhys 189). By leaping into the pool at Coulibri, Antoinette's death becomes a defiant sign of victory. Her soul, quenched by Rochester's domineering, is released as her zombi-self is permanently deanimated. Lauro notes that many rebel slaves believed their deaths would release their souls from their bodies to, “awaken in Africa, finally free from the curse of a living death” that was slavery (Lauro 52). In the same way, Antoinette's final dream state suggests that her own soul has been released from her zombi body to return home to Jamaica, free at last from all social divisions and expectations.

Furthermore, Antoinette destroys the tangible representation of her colonization before she goes. Thornfield Hall is the ancestral home of the Rochesters. It is built and bolstered by the wealth of empire. It is also the symbol both of Rochester and of Antoinette/Bertha's oppression. Rochester begins its destruction after his marriage to Antoinette falls apart by bringing foreign mistresses and illegitimate children into his ancestral home, a space that ought to be England's pure imperial center. This destruction is made complete when Bertha burns Thornfield to the ground. By doing this, Antoinette shows that she is not merely content to destroy her master. Rather, Antoinette seeks to upend the colonial system in its entirety, removing the physical marker of her husband's social standing and identity by way of violent retribution.

VI. The Fate of the Zombi-Bokor

In this way, Antoinette's final act of burning Thornfield to the ground mirrors the final acts of a revolution. Much like the Jamaican rebellions or the Haitian Revolution, the collapse of Rochester's microcosm of the colonial system is violent and totalizing. It results not only in the destruction of a single oppressor, but rather in the mass murder (or in Antoinette's case, the attempted mass murder) of everyone associated with the system and the mass destruction of everything that the system built. In Haiti, this meant the destruction of plantations, the massacre of white occupants living on the island, and the ultimate deprivation of identity in Dessalines' declaration that the whole of Haiti should henceforth be black regardless of their race. In Brontë and Rhys' works, this means the destruction of the Rochester family home and the reduction of the ultimate heir to a blind cripple.

This inevitable and destructive end delivered at the hands of the very zombi that Rochester strove to create suggest that as a bokor Rochester is a complete and utter failure. He cannot fully replicate the pattern of brokenness that he himself is subject to. In the case of Jane, he cannot ever reach her soul to deprive her of it. "I could bend her with my finger and thumb," Rochester cries at one point, "Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it...And it is you, spirit...that I want" (Brontë 321). With Antoinette he faces a similar crisis. Though he asserts that Antoinette is his "doll," she still harbors a secret knowledge in her soul that Rochester cannot grasp. "I hated the mountains and the hills" Rochester declares as he leaves Granbois, "I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret

I would never know...Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it” (Rhys 172). Antoinette understands the colony intimately, but Rochester can only see glimpses of that understanding through her. When he makes her into a zombi, he loses access to Antoinette’s secret knowledge. Her intimacy with the land is buried deep within her where Rochester cannot get to it in order to destroy it.

Rochester’s failure as a colonizer-bokor may stem in part from his alternate identity as a zombi. He is a subject of a pattern of brokenness, and though he vacillates between being a zombi who complies (marrying Antoinette) and being a zombi who rebels (bringing foreigners into his British home), he is always a reactionary figure in relationship to the idea of empire, and is consequently always a zombi. As a zombi, Rochester can receive no happy ending. Zombis are never brought back to life, only deanimated. In the case of Antoinette, her deanimation returned her soul to the happiest moments in her childhood home. In the case of Rochester, however, his deanimation removed him from society altogether to live as a crippled hermit in a decaying house.

In the end, it is not the deanimation that salvages Rochester’s fate, but rather his reanimation at the hands of a new bokor. When Jane returns to marry Rochester, she does so as an independently wealthy woman. No longer can Rochester force her into being his doll by lavishing her with gifts she could not otherwise afford. By the end of the novel it is Jane who is controlling Rochester’s access to the world. She is, for lack of a better term, the novel’s final bokor. “It was *my* time to assume ascendancy,” Jane notes later in the narrative, “*My* powers were in play and in force” (Brontë 427). It is she who remakes

him into her husband, banishing his despondency and returning his vigor, so much so that he regains his sight and consequently some of his agency as a British man. She perpetuates the system in a way similar to Dessalines, swinging the pendulum backwards so that those who were once oppressed now hold that same identity-reshaping power over those who oppressed them. Jane promptly sends Adèle to an English school that will, “[correct] in a great measure her French defects,” rewriting young Adèle’s identity in much the same way as Rochester’s was rewritten. The child of Rochester’s former mistress has little place in Jane’s new order, however. Aside from the brief mention of her being sent away to school, she does not appear at all in the final section of the novel. Jane and Rochester eventually have a child, a son whose “large, brilliant, and black” eyes will learn by observing the ascendancy of his mother. This suggests that Rochester’s failure as a bokor, a failure caused by his own zombification at the hands of the same system that he sought to perpetuate, ultimately results in the establishment of a rival system that threatens nothing less than the complete redefinition of social roles within the Empire.

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