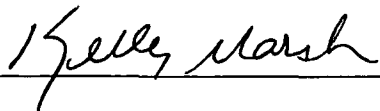


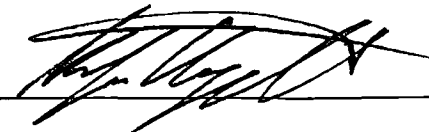
“Why do we laugh when we should cry?...Is it only here in this sad island?": Gender, Affect, and Empire in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Johnston's *Fool's Sanctuary*

Kylie Dennis  
Mississippi State University  
Senior Honors Thesis  
Spring 2016

Approved:



Kelly Marsh  
Associate Professor of English  
(Director of Thesis)



Shalyn Claggett  
Associate Professor of English  
(Committee)



Thomas Anderson  
Professor of English  
(Shackouls Honors College Representative)

“Why do we laugh when we should cry?...Is it only here in this sad island?": Gender, Affect, and  
Empire in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Johnston's *Fool's Sanctuary*

Kylie Dennis  
Mississippi State University  
Senior Honors Thesis  
Spring 2016

## Table of Contents

“She laughed”: An Introduction	1
Chapter One: “Don’t laugh like that, Bertha”: Laughter and the Limits of Female Expression in Rhys’s <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	8
Chapter Two: “My pain comes when I laugh”: Gendered and Racialized Laughter in Johnston’s <i>Fool’s Sanctuary</i>	39
“Laughter, and in the laughter the door opened”: A Conclusion	83

## “She laughed”: An Introduction

British colonial literature has produced no shortage of the silent woman: she has surfaced in a variety of disguises as the domestic wife, the colonial woman, and the mysterious, exoticized other. For contemporary women writers interested in countries occupied by British forces, the prominence of the silent woman has produced a dilemma of writing agentic female characters and women's voices into literature without centuries of historical precedent for doing so. For Jean Rhys and Jennifer Johnston, dissatisfaction with the representation of women's narratives has inspired novels that engage with iconic colonial women, revising their stories and reconsidering the space for female political and emotional expression. These efforts pre-dated the development of the sub-field in affect theory currently forming within literary studies, with intersections in multiple disciplines and theoretical frameworks. Their early understanding of the significance of affect in revitalizing women's narratives is evidenced in their mutual interest in laughter in their early novels. However, this expressive form proves far removed from its traditional association with humor and comedy. Rather, Rhys and Johnston use laughter as a tool to expose the gendered and racialized dimensions of affective expression and to highlight the precarious position of women's narratives in historic periods overwhelming represented by the narratives of imperial men. In their efforts to bring about a widespread re-evaluation of the voices of women in colonial literature, Rhys and Johnston call for more nuanced understanding of the importance of affective forms, specifically laughter.

In *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud's explanation of laughter outlines a versatile practice that reflects both conscious and subconscious motives, particularly in high-tension situations. He begins with laughter as we typically conceive it, expressing emotion. Freud defines this form of laughter as the mental process of pleasure that occurs “when satisfying the intention is barred by some external obstacle which the joke is able

to get around” or when “internal resistance is overcome and inhibition lifted with the aid of a joke” (113, 114). Expressive laughter, then, is concentrated within the individual, providing less political footing than personal catharsis. However, Freud also acknowledges the hostile side of laughter, noting that “[o]ne can make a person comical in order to make him contemptible and rob him of any claim on dignity or authority,” and suggesting further that “our laughter is undeniably the expression of our pleasure in the superiority we ascribe to ourselves in relation to [the person we have made comical]” (183, 189). In light of its social impact, this form of laughter proves highly political. Different still, Freud identifies a final, abstract form of laughter that functions as a response to the laughing subject’s acknowledgement of excess. He argues that this form of laughter surfaces when we compare the significant expenditure of someone else’s disproportionate and impracticable movements, emotions, or beliefs to our own energy expenditure when reimagining those expressions. The difference in energy expenditure between external excess and internal reimaginings or insufficiencies is released as laughter (184).

Freud’s work provides a critical starting point for engaging with the complexities of laughter and the laughing subject. Stemming from his focus on the logical construction of the joke, Freud’s reading of laughter as a calculated rather than purely reactionary response elevates the expression to a form of politically charged exchange and, in turn, a locus for subversion and control. Additionally, Freud’s primary division of laughter as either expressive or derogatory provides a foundation for further distinctions that help to make sense of the social and political rules of the expression. However, the potential of Freud’s theory appears unrealized at the level of differentiating uses of laughter according to community demographics. Preoccupied with developing a single, comprehensive theory of laughter, Freud assumes a homogenous population of laughing subjects without explicit reference to divisions of race and gender that complicate

access to traditional forms of political communication such as speech. In doing so, Freud explores laughter exclusively as it functions within the privileged affective space provided to white imperial males, neglecting to account for the restrictions on affective expression that intimately impact marginalized communities.

Examining the use of laughter outside of Freud's limited demographic necessitates the development of more specific categories and a more nuanced understanding of the gendered and racialized dimensions of the expression. This proves especially relevant in settings of significant social and political tension where creative affective responses surface to combat narrowing opportunities for expression in marginalized communities. In colonial environments, particularly those that arise in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British Empire, masculine imperialist values and rigid Victorian gender roles intersect, producing an impossible paradox for feminine gender performance. Scholars of gender and empire chronicle the experiences of women in these newly politicized domestic spaces, which produced a new generation of wives and daughters charged with enforcing the cultural superiority of the colonizers and, in many cases, responsible for reproducing nationalist rhetoric as symbolic figures for the state. Paradoxically, the centrality of the Angel in the House archetype remained unquestioned, demanding women's continued adherence to roles of silence, sacrifice, and submission.

This fragmentation of female social identity in colonial settings proved detrimental to female affective expression. The rebranding of colonial femininity produced competing demands for agentic political expression and silence, resulting in the impossibility of expression in any capacity without fear of reprimand. Therefore, the paradoxical colonial woman of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century endured the trauma inherent in the narrative of colonization without the aid of cathartic or political expressive forms. This condition proved still more hostile for

women additionally marginalized by their association with racial stigma either as a result of their non-imperial ancestry or their close association with colonized subjects.

The colonization of women's affective space, then, paralleled the colonization of new territories under the British Empire. Therefore, research on the emotional and political expressions of women in colonial settings reveals as much about gendered and racialized oppression as it does about subversive affective strategies. Outside of the parameters of traditional masculine discourse, laughter surfaces as a uniquely powerful form of communication that straddles the divide between feminine emotional release and masculine political speech. Indeed, laughter also possesses the unique ability to interrupt both speech and silence, troubling affective power dynamics and exposing the constructed nature of imperial masculine rule. Due to its intimate connection with issues of race and gender, laughter also proves critical to the formation and expression of colonial and colonized identity and determines, in part, a person's ability to navigate through imperial spaces. Therefore, patterns of surveillance by and retaliation from imperial masculine figures, directed at silencing the inherently subversive laughter of women and colonized subjects, surface repeatedly in literature embedded in these environments. Research that foregrounds the laughter of marginalized subjects validates the creative affective efforts deployed by oppressed communities to interrupt and rewrite the narrative of colonization.

This thesis considers the laughter of imperial men, colonial women, and colonized subjects in two novels situated in the colonies of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British Empire. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) reconstructs the traumatic childhood and adolescence of Antoinette Mason Rochester that culminates in the secondary narrative of the madwoman in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Set in post-emancipation Jamaica, Antoinette's semi-autobiographical narrative traces her desperate attempts to disinherit the fate of her mother,

a woman driven to madness by her position as a paradoxical Victorian colonial woman confronted with widespread racial tension and dissatisfaction with her loveless imperial marriage. Similarly, Jennifer Johnston's novel, *Fool's Sanctuary* (1987), revives the heroine in Shakespeare's iconic colonial narrative, *The Tempest*, recasting Miranda as the daughter of an Anglo-Irish patriarch at the height of Ireland's War for Independence. Both novels reconstruct the colonial environment and domestic sphere at a moment of political upheaval. The colonial manor in Rhys's narrative and the Big House in Johnston's novel transition into sites of violence when racial turmoil inspires guerilla warfare perpetrated by members of the respective colonized populations. As a result, the colonial women, isolated from female contact as a result of their mothers' early deaths and racialized by their association with colonized subjects, endure an identical struggle to process the collision of two worlds without an appropriate form of expression with which to articulate their trauma and construct new, coherent identities. Perhaps most significantly, however, both Miranda and Antoinette respond to their affective subjugation with a relentless search for agentic expression in laughter.

Analyzing the usage of racialized and gendered laughter in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Fool's Sanctuary* offers intriguing conclusions about the nature of affect in colonial situations. However, the novels' fundamental differences may offer still more significant insight into this expressive form. Separated by a period of nearly one hundred years and a geographic distance of thousands of miles, the colonial spaces in Rhys's and Johnston's novels represent distant edges of the Empire characterized by separate cultures and experiences. Therefore, while the appearance of laughter in both colonies suggests its popularity as a rhetorical device, significant similarities in the gendering, racializing, and usage of laughter may suggest a set of rules for colonial laughter that transcend time and space.



This thesis will investigate the extent to which the rules of laughter work similarly or differently in two colonies separated by time and location in the works of Rhys and Johnston. It will examine the differential treatment of laughter by men and women and the forms of laughter made available to characters as a result of their gender and the gendered models of laughter in preceding generations. Similarly, it will analyze the ways in which race and gender intersect to create fewer opportunities for affective expression for colonized subjects and the colonial women associated with them. In the first chapter, I will analyze instances of the suppression of laughter and the use of dismissive laughter, disparaging laughter, vulnerable emotional laughter, and the androgynous laughter of madness in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the second chapter, I will discuss the recurrence of repressive, dismissive, carefree and disparaging laughter in Johnston's *Fool's Sanctuary* before analyzing the development of novel forms of the expression that surface in the creation of figures such as the joker and the fool. By attempting to understand the complexities of the gendered and racialized exchange of laughing subjects and comedic objects in colonial environments, I argue that patterns of laughter provide unique insight into the affective suppression and subversive expressions of women and colonized subjects. In doing so, I also seek to acknowledge the efforts of women writers whose revisions of historical narratives reinvigorate the legacies of silent heroines, writing the language of laughter into literature.

Works Cited

Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Trans. Joyce Crick. New York: Penguin, 2003. Rpt. Leipzig and Vienna: Deuticke, 1905. Print.

## Chapter One

“Don’t laugh like that, Bertha”: Laughter and the Limits of Female Expression in Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jean Rhys’s dissatisfaction with the treatment of the Creole madwoman in *Jane Eyre* stems not only from Brontë’s marginalization of Bertha Rochester, but also from the troubling, singular characterization of her. Indeed, with the exception of Jane’s brief physical description of Bertha just prior to the wedding, Brontë’s narrative alludes to the existence of Rochester’s wife primarily in terms of her one-dimensional laughter as it occasionally disrupts the aura of English refinement at Thornfield Hall. Jane recalls a laugh that is “mirthless,” “tragic,” and “preternatural,” an inhuman “goblin ha! ha!” (Brontë 117, 231). In contrast, Rhys’s 1966 novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, revisits and revises Brontë’s master work, focusing on laughter as an expression complicated by its numerous motives and forms, significant in its role in maintaining the degraded status of the object and the superiority of the laughing subject, and revealing in its relation to the cultures that employ it. This chapter will argue that the motif of laughter in Rhys’s work acts as a commentary on the emotional suppression of Antoinette as the exotic “other,” as she is usually interpreted, but more significantly, as a Victorian colonial woman severely limited by the available models of emotional expression deemed appropriate for her gender. Incorporating Freud’s understanding of laughter as a device by which the tension from prominent racial, cultural, and gender divides is released for cathartic or malicious effect, this chapter will examine Antoinette’s and Rochester’s subjection to and manipulation of laughter and identify the role of minor characters as models of the available forms of laughter. In establishing a complex system of laughter as oppressive for her heroine as it is constructive and profitable for Rochester, Rhys reexamines and revises the confining one-dimensional laugh of Brontë’s helpless madwoman, creating a narrative that considers the precarious position of

female emotions in Victorian colonial society and offers a far more agentic reading of Antoinette's final laugh.

Scholars of gender and empire explore representations of Victorian colonial women in the political and domestic spheres and in relation to the rules for suppressing emotion in newly colonized territories. In contrast to the popular "myth of the destructive female," which implicates colonial women in the downfall of the British Empire, Margaret Strobel and others examine the centrality of colonial wives in the construction of imperial superiority (2). Strobel argues that newly immigrated European women were responsible for "much of the work of distinguishing the European community from the indigenous masses, so essential within the racist, ethnocentric framework of colonialism" (15). Although associated with feminine tasks traditionally considered trivial, the significance of the Victorian colonial woman culminated in her role as a herald of English values and ideologies. Strobel identifies the everyday assertions of English customs in dress, architecture, language, and gender roles as the moving parts of a larger normalizing force intended to justify the colonial presence (2). In the absence of the patriarch tasked with the political management of the colony, colonial women represented a network of social surveillance that sought to maintain separation from indigenous communities even while infiltrating and altering their private affairs. Catherine Hall explains this process of racial and gendered hierarchization: "the colonizers made themselves; in demarcating black masculinity, they enunciated white masculinity, in demarcating brown femininity, they elevated white femininity" (50). Additionally, with the introduction of white women into indigenous societies, the temporary dwellings of male settlers were transformed into permanent households and "base[s] for processes of cultural reproduction" (Hall 67).

Philippa Levine refers to this phenomenon as “making a new home,” alluding as much to the “motif of domesticity” brought on by the influx of colonial wives as the process of Anglicizing new territories (8). The colonial domestic space became a political forum in which white women exercised their agency on a scale previously unseen, and, as Hall states, the requirements of the colonized world “case[d] women in a masculine mould” in which “[d]omesticated feminine women could not survive” (73). However, the masculinization of colonial woman did not secure their transcendence of the restrictive gender roles of Victorian England. On the contrary, the silent, submissive, and hyper-feminine qualities of the Victorian gentlewoman were understood as equally essential in ensuring the colony’s success. The subordinate woman was a necessary role in the elaborate performance of the proper English household, played out each day before an audience of colonized peoples. Hall notes that the superior moral fiber and nurturing impulses associated with traditional femininity were also called upon to “transform and redeem the society” and to soothe “antagonisms between settlers” (71, 70). At the intersection of these incompatible gender roles—masculine agent and feminine subordinate—the Victorian colonial woman rests in utter paradox, an “elevated yet inferior female” who is “central to the enterprise yet with no independent status” (51, 60).

Stretched between two contradictory ideals, the impossible demands for Victorian colonial women were compounded with the additional injury of the rigid policing of emotional expression. As Strobel notes, “Standards of behavior had to be preserved in front of the servants in order to maintain the appearance of dignity so essential to colonial domination” (23). This included a careful surveillance of emotions capable of exposing the paradoxical nature of women’s roles or allowing for a re-articulation of identity outside of these constraints. The authoritative voice necessitated by the masculinization of women in newly political spheres was

undermined by the wife's fundamental vow of silence. Similarly, the limited emotional expressiveness permitted to Victorian women eroded with new demands for an emotionless, masculinized leader in the household. For Rhys's Victorian colonial women, the denial of emotional space in which to voice fear, anger, and confusion regarding their place in the turbulent climate of nineteenth-century Jamaica proves particularly detrimental. Charged with acting as the embodiment of English values for the colonized subalterns, Annette and Antoinette must uncover a way to emulate the customs of a country they have never visited, establish their refinement while ravaged by poverty, secure their superiority while the institution that oppresses the colonized race dissolves, and represent themselves within a patriarchal framework after being abandoned by their patriarch and endowed with a mentally and physically impaired male heir. Furthermore, they must succeed in this charge without the aid of political or emotional expression. Rhys complicates the already impossible position of the Victorian colonial woman in a commentary on the precarious nature of colonizing control. When the image of the Victorian family is imperfectly modeled, the constructedness of power is exposed, laying the colonizer open to ridicule. Rhys explores the resulting struggle in the complex exchange of laughter, tracing the rise of gendered and racialized regulations that render the Victorian colonial woman without any appropriate form of recourse to her oppression. The work of Strobel, Hall, and Levine brings new significance to the role of gender in Rhys's novel, a subject that continues to interest critics.

Much of the criticism regarding gender in *Wide Sargasso Sea* concerns itself with the absence of discourse in the novel, reading the abundance of ellipses, page breaks, and forced silences as either a strategy to maintain subjectivity or a means of subversive resistance. Hilda van Neck-Yoder argues that Antoinette maintains her authority by censoring the narrative that

“consists of experiences that undercut the premises of colonialism,” which she holds as “natural and immutable” (186). She asserts further that a “narrating Rochester constructs a fictional explanation...that silences the shattering effect of what he knows to be the truth,” namely, that he has been extricated from within the “ranks” of subjectivity and legally bound to a member of the “othered” racial group (194). In a similar vein, Monika Pietrzak-Franger analyzes Rochester’s omission of discourse as a means of oppressing both women and the Jamaican subalterns in the novel. She asserts that the male narrator’s “unuttered thoughts, half-pronounced words [and] definite refusal to speak...assert his homogenous and hegemonic self” even while at times “undermin[ing] the cohesion of his masculinity” (12). Directing attention away from the novel’s narrators, Carine Mardorossian describes silence as an action of resistance by the Jamaican subalterns. She argues that “colonialist discourse [does] not falter and lose ground when black subalterns speak but paradoxically when they are silenced and stereotyped” (1072). Anne Koenen takes an altogether different stance on the motif of silence, analyzing specifically how it relates to the narrative’s structure and place in the literary canon. Her article argues that “*Wide Sargasso Sea* does not merely retell Bertha’s story in an act of overcoming that deeply-felt silence in *Jane Eyre*, but dramatizes this silence, lets us feel what is missing and elevates it to a conscious level, haunting us with the lacunae of the feminine voice” (15). Although Rhys mostly confines Antoinette’s narrative to the disproportionately shorter first and final parts of the novel, Koenen reasons that allowing Antoinette to speak uninterrupted would dismiss the trope of silence in women’s literature without adequately seeking to correct it. These critics offer convincing arguments for the role of silence both as an effective form of oppression and resistance for Rochester, Antoinette, and the Jamaican subalterns.

In contrast to these investigations of silence in the novel, other critics concentrate on the role of discourse as a means of constructing imperial masculinity or combatting oppression and misidentification. Miki Flockemann's approach to discourse in *Wide Sargasso Sea* considers the role of language in engendering Antoinette's madness. She argues that Rhys's narrative exposes the association of "Creole and coloured identity with shame, defilement, sexual deviance and madness" and examines the ways in which "selfhood is redefined" within the parameters of this limited discourse (67). Kathy Mezei continues this argument, suggesting that Antoinette successfully protects her identity by narrating her own story: "Thus, despite Rochester's malediction, Antoinette does 'tell it,' and the telling of her secret, her memories, and her story mirrors her desperate effort to save herself from a lie" (196). In a similar vein but focusing on the male narrator, Robert Kendrick's analysis argues that Rochester is forced to "rearticulat[e] and redefin[e] his position as a masculine subject, as he reexamines the ethical implications of the masculine prerogatives that he has enjoyed and abused" (235). It is Antoinette, he argues, who ultimately reverses the power dynamic by refusing to acknowledge Rochester's discursive identity for her before jumping to her death, dying as "the disruptive supplement to the narrative of English normalcy" (253). Youngjoo Kim expresses similar concern for the discourse-dependent male narrator, stating that "Rhys's text...question[s] the formation of imperial masculinity and reveal[s] its constructedness and dependence on its colonial and gendered other" (103). These critics have done important work on the articulation of imperial power and identity.

In their deference to more traditional forms of communication, critics have explored the political motives of silence and speech, associating both practices with careful logic and larger strategies for obtaining or maintaining power. They have cited numerous examples of calculated silences that aid in shrouding the rebellion of the subalterns and in shielding the imperial male



narrator from the uncomfortable instability of the colonizer's control. Speech has received similar treatment, credited with privileging the deafening English language at the expense of subaltern voices, and rendering local dialects unintelligible or, at the very least, untranslatable. In contrast, recent scholarship affords little space to the discussion of laughter, and what discussion exists situates laughter closer to primal instinct than intelligible communication. Critics Mona Fayad and Jennifer Gilchrist broach the subject of laughter in their discussions of Rhys's novel, although only as supporting evidence for their larger claims regarding Antoinette's language and Rhys's commentary on the aftermath of the abolition of slavery. Fayad argues that "*Wide Sargasso Sea*...is a story of the 'struggle to come into being'" for Antoinette Cosway, although Rochester's punishment of Antoinette is complete only when her once agentic discourse is reduced to "nothing more than subhuman sounds" (442). Gilchrist takes a similar stance on laughter, identifying it as a signal for the changing power dynamic of the white settlers and the Jamaican people post-abolition (481).

These analyses, however, neglect to consider the surfacing of gendered laughter at key moments of speech and silence in the novel. Silence, particularly Rochester's silence, is ridiculed repeatedly in the laughter of his wife, his servants, and Daniel Cosway, the half-brother that first breaks the illusion of Antoinette's past. Similarly, speech is consistently interrupted by peals of derogatory laughter used by and against nearly all of the novel's principle characters. Where speech proves unstable in the divide between two cultures, laughter's political relevance and gender dimensions extend across racial lines. In contrast to critics' previous accounts, I argue that masculine laughter's careful appearance and calculated effects demonstrate its logical and strategic origins similar to that of the novel's languages and erasures. More critically still, masculine laughter appears to overpower speech and silence in its interruption and corruption of

both. When laughter erupts in critical instances of discourse or silence, it unmask these expressions as the tools with which characters manufacture their superiority. By dispelling the myth of inherent authority and by temporarily upsetting the dynamic between the newly comedic object and the laughing subject, masculine laughter supersedes speech and silence in exposing the constructedness of power. By contrast, feminine laughter surfaces to express emotion more often than to communicate political desire. Indeed, only Antoinette and her mother, Rhys's Victorian colonial women, find it a struggle to secure their position in the complex exchange of comedic objects and laughing subjects. In the final moments of Antoinette's narration, however, feminine laughter is transformed into an androgynous expression that threatens to defy speech, silence, and the binary rules of laughter. In accordance with Freud's preliminary ideas of laughter, Rhys expands and complicates the one-dimensional expression of Thornfield's captive, elevating laughter to the single form of communication successful in releasing emotional and political sentiments deemed inappropriate in traditional discourse.

Freud's primary divisions of laughter are useful in sorting through the wealth of laughter in Rhys's writing for initial comparison. However, the historically rigid social divisions of post-emancipation Jamaica necessitate the development of still more specific categories for laughter, namely along the heavily policed gendered divide. The range of possibilities for expression through laughter is illustrated for each narrator by the minor characters that precede them. These minor characters act as gendered models of the laughing styles available to Antoinette and Rochester. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, strategic, political laughter dominates the conversations of men. This hostile comedy serves as the language through which controversy is stifled and the power dynamic between the comedic object and the laughing subject is carefully constructed. Rochester's laughter shifts seamlessly between Mr. Mason's dismissive laughter of

incomprehension towards post-abolition injustice, the Jamaican people's mocking laughter of resistance, and Alexander Cosway's derogatory laughter of white imperial superiority. By contrast, Annette's experience conveys to Antoinette that women are relegated to expressive yet politically ineffective laughter that vocalizes their vulnerability within the patriarchal framework. Outside of both sexes, laughter in the face of excess takes on a dangerously androgynous character reserved for madness. This laughter is critical in gauging the laughing subject's understanding of exaggerated political or social forces in colonial situations. Unlike the masculine continuum of types of laughter, this absence of versatility in appropriate female expression compounded with the apparent contradiction of the Victorian colonial woman sets the stage for the significant mental and emotional strain experienced by Antoinette, necessitating the radical nature of her final act.

Rhys's initial exploration of masculine laughter examines the dismissive, uncomprehending laughter of the white male settlers in Antoinette's homeland. Even before Rochester's arrival in Jamaica, his relationship with laughter is informed by the repressive treatment of emotion in Victorian England—as Daniel Cosway notes, “you want to do everything quiet like the English can” (76)—and modeled by Mr. Mason, the husband of Annette and the owner of the inheritance that Rochester will later command. Mr. Mason's use of laughter reveals an attempt to alleviate his own cognitive dissonance, to release the tension caused by his knowledge of the unjust treatment of ex-slaves and his complicity in maintaining the social structure that marginalizes and oppresses them. Indeed, Mr. Mason's laughter erupts primarily in response to Antoinette and her mother's concern over their dangerous position in the post-abolition colony. Antoinette perceives her step-father's inability to address the seriousness of the racial and cultural divide first in her reluctance to voice her dread of Christophine's obeah

practice for fear that “Mr. Mason would laugh if he knew how frightened [she] had been,” and again when she assigns her step-father a title reserved for slave owners. The narrator recalls saying, “Goodnight white pappy,” to her step-father one evening, although he is “not vexed” as she anticipates in response to this racial slur. Rather, “he laugh[s]” (19, 20). Annette’s impassioned pleas for the safety of herself and her family—“The people here hate us. They certainly hate me” (19)—elicit an even more exaggerated expression of incomprehension from her husband. Refusing to acknowledge the threat of the ex-slaves or to heed the warning of his wife, Mr. Mason silences the reminder of his guilt with an immediate “heart[y]” laugh (19). The juxtaposition of the physical threat of racial tension and Mr. Mason’s dismissive attitude reaches its climax in the final scene of Part One of the novel. Even as Antoinette recalls the mass of infuriated ex-slaves surrounding her home, yelling, pelting the property with rocks, and setting her brother’s room on fire, Mr. Mason clings to the remnants of his dismissive laughter, attempting “to smile” as he physically separates himself from the cries of the revolting ex-slaves by “shut[ting] and bolt[ing] the door” (23). It is this reminder of her husband’s deliberate incomprehension of their danger that provokes Annette’s final exclamation, “You would not listen...you grinning hypocrite, you ought not to live either, you know so much don’t you?” (24). Here, Annette attempts to expose and silence the repressive laughter of English culture. When Mr. Mason escapes punishment for his dismissive treatment of the injustice that saturates Jamaican culture, Annette comes to understand dismissive laughter as the expressive form that simultaneously victimizes and eludes her. Although Mr. Mason dies long before Rochester’s arrival in Jamaica, Rochester inherits his wealth and privileged social status, his role as the husband of a mad Creole woman, and also with these legacies, his style of laughter.

Originating from the same culture that produced his predecessor, Rochester fills the absence of Mr. Mason during his narration in Part Two, exuding the same dismissive attitude toward the racial crises around him and employing the same intentionally uncomprehending laughter modeled by the white settlers in Jamaica and the English gentry. Indeed, Rochester traces his understanding of laughter back to the emphasis on repression in his upbringing, “How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted” (61). In his attempts to cope with what he views as the natural, sexual, and emotional excess of Antoinette’s homeland, Rochester’s repressive tendencies manifest themselves in his repression of the laughter of others. In his conversation with Amélie regarding Daniel Cosway’s second letter, Rochester states, “at any moment her smile would become loud laughter. It was to stop this that I went on” (72). This tendency resurfaces in his chastisement of Antoinette’s laughter in their discussion of her family’s history: “Don’t laugh like that, Bertha” (81). Rochester’s fear of unbridled laughter indicates his ties to a culture founded on restraint, but more important still, it reveals an attempt to silence the hostility and truth released in the laughter of others: Amélie in her knowledge of his cuckoldry and Antoinette in the unsettling account of her mother’s spiral into madness. Indeed, Rochester’s own laughter in the opening of his narrative appears only in the calculated form of dismissive, uncomprehending laughter as exemplified by Mr. Mason. Prior to his marriage, his dismissive laughter toward Antoinette’s desire for peace and protection prompts her to call off the engagement. Antoinette notes, “Richard came in and you laughed. I didn’t like the way you laughed” (46), perhaps in remembrance of her mother’s final retaliation against Mr. Mason. Following the marriage, Rochester demonstrates a similar dismissive laughter toward the bleak future outlined for Antoinette as a beautiful but fragile Victorian woman. He compares her

to a rose: “‘*Rose elle a vecu,*’ [he] said and laughed. ‘Is that poem true? Have all beautiful things sad destinies?’” (51). Like Mr. Mason, Rochester’s inability to acknowledge the uncertain future of Antoinette in post-abolition Jamaica in serious terms reveals his reluctance to confront the hostile racial environment that brings about that instability. However, although Mr. Mason’s uncomprehending laughter functions as an initial defense for Rochester upon his arrival in Jamaica, his later experiences with laughter and mockery necessitate his acceptance of a new model of laughter entirely.

Rochester’s relationship to the mocking laughter of the Jamaican people during his honeymoon period signals a shift from his role as the imperial authority figure who represses untamed emotions to the object of ridicule for the Jamaican subalterns. As a figurehead for the colonizers, he becomes the English scapegoat upon which ex-slaves heap hostility over their enslavement and their continued oppression in post-abolition Jamaica. Consistent with Freud’s theory of laughter as a means of reversing superiority by making an individual comic “as a consequence of human dependence on external circumstances...[and] social factors,” the black subalterns humiliate, alienate, and emasculate Rochester (193). Servants Amélie and Hilda immediately ridicule the male narrator, a fact of which Rochester is keenly aware. In only the fourth sentence of Rochester’s narration, he notes Amélie’s statement, “I hope you will be very happy, sir, in your sweet honeymoon house,” but is aware from her demeanor and the exaggerated nature of her kindness that “She was laughing at [him]” (38). Amélie’s contempt for Rochester increases with time as demonstrated by the increasing intensity of her taunting. Following their discussion of Sandi Cosway, whom Amélie claims Antoinette would never marry because of his mixed race, Amélie “put[s] her hand over her mouth as though she could not stop herself from laughing and walk[s] away” (73). Here, Amélie’s attempt to affirm

Rochester's imperial beliefs regarding the rigidity of racial stratification provokes violent laughter from the Jamaican servant who has seen the deconstruction of racial divides in her mistress's past relationships. In a similar fashion, Hilda targets Rochester's English blood in her initial mockery of him, particularly focusing on his discourse. Antoinette writes, "He spoke good English, but in the middle of his address of welcome Hilda began to giggle" (43). This derision later evolves from a general ridicule of his foreignness to an emasculating laugh as Hilda witnesses his failed attempts to command authority in his marriage. Following Rochester's excursion into the Jamaican wilderness, he returns to find Antoinette locked in her room. He recalls, "I tried the door...It was bolted and there was no light. Hilda giggled" (64). Here, Hilda's giggle is significant because it derides Rochester's inability to access the wife he attempts to control and to have free reign in the house he now owns.

Daniel Cosway and Christophine share a similar emasculating laugh at the expense of the male narrator. Daniel attempts to dismantle Rochester's claim to superiority by ridiculing his cuckoldry. When the English gentleman visits Daniel's cottage, Daniel jests, "Your wife know Sandi since long time. Ask her and she tell you. But not everything I think," before laughing at Rochester's predicament (75). His mocking fixation on Antoinette's sexual liberty with other men denies Rochester's ownership of his wife through marriage. Similarly, when Rochester lays claim to Antoinette following her emotional breakdown, Christophine retorts, "Your *wife!*...You make me laugh...you want to break her up, because you jealous of her. She is more better than you, she have better blood in her" (91-92). Christophine's laughter targets Rochester's understanding of the traditional English marriage between a husband and his submissive wife, rejecting his claims to superiority based on English exceptionalism by implying his envy of the Creole "other." However, while Rochester is briefly the subject of the hostile comedy of the

Jamaican people, his observations of laughter as a device through which previously oppressed populations can express agency and take a political stance against him prompt his own adaptation of a far more aggressive model of masculine laughter.

Following his experiences as the target of aggression for ex-slaves, Rochester abandons his previous understanding of laughter as a dismissive, repressed emotion, shifting to a manipulative, self-serving form of laughter modeled by Mr. Cosway. Although only briefly appearing in the novel through the memory of his estranged son, Mr. Cosway is characterized by the disparaging laugh of white imperial superiority, a laugh that relieves the tension caused by abolition by attempting to reaffirm the same racialized social structure that preceded abolition. As Daniel recounts his conversation with his father regarding his rights to the family name and money, he states, “He laugh in my face. When he finished laughing he call me what’s-your-name” (74). Here, it is not Daniel’s presence that provokes the laughter of Mr. Cosway, but rather his claim to equality and English wealth despite his marginalization as a black subaltern. This is indicated by Mr. Cosway’s further step to un-name Daniel, stripping from him the agency he desires, removing his individuality in order to blend him back into the faceless mass of subalterns, and reinstating the racial divide between slave master and slave.

Rochester makes similar use of this masculine form of laughter in order to upset the racial power dynamic in Jamaica and reaffirm his superiority over the locals who ridicule him. Triggered by Antoinette’s use of obeah powder on him and Amélie’s pity, Rochester laughs an uncharacteristic mocking laugh as indicated by Amélie’s instinct to “place her hand over [his] mouth apprehensively” (84). In this instance, Amélie silences Rochester as she has attempted to silence her own mocking laughter many times before. In the affair that follows between the male narrator and Amélie, Rochester uses physical means to reverse the power dynamic in his



marriage, punishing Antoinette for her sexual liberation and obeah practice and commanding respect from the female servant whose sympathy consistently belittles him. However, the prominence of laughter in this scene, particularly Rochester's laughter, attests to his understanding of the powerful psychological effects that Mr. Cosway's superior laugh has on those made comic by it. Rochester writes, "[W]e were both laughing. That is what I remember most about that encounter," and as Christophine notes in a later conversation with him, "You meant [Antoinette] to hear" (84, 93). While Rochester's affair with Amélie provides a turning point in his relationship with his wife, it is also the climax of his use of white imperial laughter. Following this scene, a string of disparaging laughs issues from the male narrator, aimed at the Jamaican characters whose previous ridicule attempted to undermine his authority. In response to Amélie's plans for her future, Rochester "laugh[s] and tease[s] her" (85). Rochester laughs again at Baptiste's news that the cook has fled, foreshadowing the downfall of the household, and then at Baptiste, recalling his reluctance to acknowledge the existence of a surviving symbol of colonization in the island's wilderness: "'No road?' I said and laughed" (85, 86). The malicious intent of Rochester's laughter is perhaps most apparent in his final interaction with Christophine. When the obeah woman suggests that Antoinette live independently of her husband and find happiness elsewhere, Rochester notes, "A pang of rage and jealousy shot through me then. Oh no, she won't forget. I laughed" (95). Here, Rochester inadvertently reveals his fear of having his authority further challenged by his Creole wife's denial of the existence of her English husband. The imperial laughter following this demand for respect functions as a means of reassuring and vocalizing his newfound power. Likewise, Rochester seals the threat of imprisonment for Christophine with the imperial laugh that confirms his superiority and cements the racial divide, making Christophine comic in her role as the harmless mammy figure: "Of course I laugh at

you—you ridiculous old woman” (95). Taking cues from the form of masculine laughter modeled by slave owner Mr. Cosway, Rochester’s use of laughter later in his narrative reverses the mocking laughter of the Jamaican people and reinstates his power in a manner far more effective in the Jamaican colony than the repressive, dismissive techniques of laughter in England.

Prior to his return to his homeland, however, Rochester’s relationship to laughter comes full circle. Following his rise to power in the colony, facilitated by the use of manipulative, mocking laughter, Rochester prepares for his return to England’s culture of restraint by shifting seamlessly back into the original form of emotional expression available to him: repressed or dismissive laughter. This transition is clear in the resurfacing of his repression of Antoinette’s laughter. He writes, “She’ll not laugh in the sun again,” foreshadowing the later physical suppression of her voice and laughter by imprisonment in the attic of Thornfield (99).

Additionally, although Rochester appears to grant his wife a space for emotional expression in their final scene together—“If she too says [good-bye], or weeps, I’ll take her into my arms, my lunatic...If she smiles or weeps or both. *For me*” (99)—this offer does not extend to the use of laughter, a form of power and resistance he is all too familiar with at this point in the narrative. Indeed, Rochester qualifies his approval of smiling and weeping even further by insisting that they must be “*For me*,” denying Antoinette any means of expression that does not satisfy his sense of superiority. However, Rochester’s transition surfaces even more powerfully in the closing evaluation of his own emotional stability in comparison to the excess of unrestrained emotion in Jamaica. He notes, “All of the mad conflicting emotions had gone and left me wearied and empty. Sane” (103). By his own assessment, his ability to constrain his newfound laughter and revert back into the subtlety of English culture protects him from the uncontrolled laughter and emotion that he attributes to insanity. He instead resigns his wife to this category of

madness as one who cannot comprehend, respond to, or repress laughter in a suitable way, noting “soon she’ll join all the others... They can be recognized. White faces, dazed eyes, aimless gestures, high-pitched laughter. The way they walk and talk and scream or try to kill... if you laugh back at them” (103). Rochester’s final words seal his transformation back into a respectable, emotionless English gentleman as he chastises a young servant boy for sobbing, “Who would have thought that any boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing...” (104). Although his understanding and use of laughter throughout the novel is complex, Rochester ends where he begins, shifting from repressing all emotion to dismissive laughter to derogatory mockery and back to repression. In each stage, the masculine models of laughter made available to him—first through the patriarchy of English culture, then through the English colonials, Mr. Mason and Mr. Cosway—facilitate Rochester’s ability to shift successfully between forms of laughter. Rochester’s complicated laughter reflects the wide range of emotional expressions deemed appropriate for his gender, a range that proves far less expansive and far less profitable for Antoinette as a Victorian colonial woman.

Antoinette’s initial understanding of laughter is a product of her upbringing in the wild landscape of Jamaica and the culture of a post-abolition colony. It is perhaps little surprise that, from an outside perspective, Rochester describes his wife’s homeland as a place of excess both in the wild vegetation and the untamed emotions of the locals. Indeed, even the weather on the island seems to reflect the mocking laughter of the ex-slaves as Rochester notes, “The contemptuous wind passes, not caring for these abject things... Howling, shrieking, laughing the wild blast passes” (98). However, Antoinette, the Creole daughter of an ex-slave owner and a native to the islands, describes the treatment of laughter in Jamaica similarly—as a hostile, untamable force that erupts frequently and violently, destabilizing the colonial social structure.

The opening of her narrative relates the all too common scene of the mockery of her mother by ex-slaves. Just as the repression of laughter in English society provides the first model of masculine laughter for Antoinette's future husband, her own early understanding of laughter stems from the relationship between women and laughter modeled for her as a child, namely, her mother's role as the object and target of comedy. Annette's status as the widow of a slave owner in post-abolition Jamaica provokes the retaliation of the ex-slaves who use mockery to release their frustrations, circumventing the protection provided to Annette and her family by their English ties. Antoinette observes, "[A]nyone passing could stare at her. They stared, sometimes they laughed" (11). Consistent with Freud's discussion of rendering someone comic by exploiting his or her attachment to social structures, Annette depends on the remnants of her privilege to avoid being associated with the "white niggers," an idea that offers a particular point of comedy for the ex-slaves. This derision eventually leads the community to poison her fine horse and jeer at her tattered clothing, the only remaining symbols of her status. However, it is worth noting that Annette's position also evokes the laughter of the rich white settlers. Antoinette describes them as "smooth smiling people" who ridicule Annette's sexual liberty under their breath in line with the English tendency of repression (17). Annette's victimization reaches its climax at the close of Part One when Antoinette witnesses the crowd of ex-slaves respond with an uproar of laughter to Annette's frantic attempts to re-enter her burning home. Aunt Cora counsels her sister, "They are laughing at you, do not allow them to laugh at you" (25). Although the men in her life prove capable of manipulating laughter in order to dismiss racial tension or affirm their superiority over the black subalterns, effective laughter is elusive for Annette, provoking fear, hatred, and helplessness rather than the motivation or insight

necessary to employ laughter herself. Accordingly, Antoinette exhibits a similar trend in her mistrust of laughter throughout the entirety of her narratives in Parts One and Three.

A product of the same culture that ridicules her mother and a witness to the use of laughter as a means of conveying hostility, Antoinette imitates and later fills in the absence of Annette, assuming the role of the helpless comedic object. Like her mother, Antoinette experiences mockery early on from both the ex-slave community and the group of newly established white settlers. When Antoinette fails to complete a proper underwater somersault to satisfy her bet with a young Jamaican girl, Tia, the girl “laughed and told [her] that it certainly looked like [she] drown dead that time” (14). Although she is Antoinette’s only friend and connection to the world outside of Coulibri, Tia’s laughter prompts Antoinette to lash out in racial slurs and return home in tears. Once there, Antoinette is again the victim of ridicule, this time from visiting white settlers who laugh at Antoinette in Tia’s ragged dress. Antoinette recalls, “They were very beautiful I thought and they wore such beautiful clothes that I looked away down at the flagstones and when they laughed—the gentlemen laughed the loudest—I ran into the house, into my bedroom” (14). Here, Antoinette again responds negatively to the mocking laughter of others, but perhaps more importantly, draws a distinction between masculine and feminine laughter, noting the male’s laughter as the more powerful of the two. Antoinette’s early awareness of the ability of masculine forms of laughter to obscure feminine laughter provides not only a brief moment of authorial commentary on the deep-rooted issue of gendered emotional expression, but also a crucial moment in Antoinette’s understanding of laughter, foreshadowing the fate of her own voice later in the novel. Again following her mother’s lead, Antoinette becomes a target for the laughter of the ex-slaves during the burning of her home at Coulibri. She writes “we could not move for they pressed too close round us. Some

of them were laughing and waving sticks...[a]nd I was afraid, because I knew that the ones who laughed would be the worst” (25). Antoinette’s fear of the laughing Jamaican people reveals her already advanced knowledge of the roots of laughter, linking comedy, hostility, and a lack of sympathy in her young mind. After the death of her mother, Antoinette attempts to challenge the relationship between laughter and aggression, searching for some personal strength arising from her mockery. In her experiences with the derisive Jamaican children on her way to the convent school—“the girl began to laugh...and it was then that hate came to me and courage with the hate so that I was able to walk past them without looking”—Antoinette recalls a brief glimmer of newfound courage (29). However, her fear of being the target of laughter continues to plague her thoughts well into adulthood, as shown by her explanation to Christophine for not leaving her abusive marriage to Rochester: “No, I will not, then everyone, not only the servants, will laugh at me” (29). While Antoinette initially fulfills the role of the comedic object in her early narration, the absence of effective models of female laughter makes more difficult and ultimately impossible her struggle to escape the victimization her mother experiences.

In contrast to the trajectory of Rochester’s emotional expression and the variety of models for masculine laughter in the novel, Antoinette’s attempts to manipulate laughter for her own benefit are limited by her continued observations of Annette. The arrival of wealthy husband Mr. Mason appears initially to resolve Annette’s struggle to successfully emote in the opening of the narrative. Antoinette observes, for the first and only time in the novel, her mother’s laugh of pleasure. She writes, “She was gay and laughing—younger than I had ever seen her and the house was sad when she had gone,” and further that “There was no need for music when she danced. They stopped and she leaned backwards over his arm...[t]hen up again in a flash, laughing” (16, 17). Consistent with Freud’s framework, Annette’s laugh of genuine

pleasure appears to arise from the process of circumventing the external obstacles of her race, poverty, and past sexual liberty compounded with the satisfaction of her desire for protection and companionship. Indeed, Antoinette's statement regarding the seriousness of her mother's situation prior to Mr. Mason's arrival—"Yes, she would have died, I thought, if she had not met him"—casts a new light on the severity of these obstacles and the necessity of this moment of emotional release (22). However, while Antoinette witnesses her mother's command of the laughter of pleasure, this laugh proves short-lived. Sensing an upset in the power dynamic between the daughter of an ex-slave holder and the newly settling elite, the white settlers respond to Annette's expression with peals of mocking laughter. In this critical moment of juxtaposition between feminine laughter and disparaging masculine laughter, Antoinette witnesses the fragility of emotional expression. The apparent political superiority of masculine laughter perverts Annette's attempts at catharsis, rendering feminine laughter a signal of vulnerability rather than transcendence. Significantly, the wild laughter of madness later consumes Antoinette's memory of this pleasurable laughter as well as the Jamaican people's memory of her mother. Still a child after the burning of Coulibri, Antoinette recalls, "I was at Aunt Cora's house in Spanish Town. I heard screams and then someone laughing very loud," and Daniel Cosway notes in his first letter to Rochester, "[Annette] shut herself away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness" (80, 57). Unable to repress her emotions like Rochester, to dismiss the ridicule of the ex-slaves like Mr. Mason, to employ the imperial laughter of Mr. Cosway, or to command the simple laughter of pleasure, Annette adopts the only remaining form of laughter available.

Bereft of effective models of feminine laughter, Antoinette's struggle and ultimate descent into madness echo the efforts of her predecessor. A reflection of her mother's initial emotional indifference, Antoinette struggles to emote in the opening pages of her narrative.

Instead, Antoinette's dissection of emotion, particularly happiness, occupies the space created by the absence of laughter. Following the observation of her mother's momentary genuine laughter and the surrounding derision of the white settlers, Antoinette crafts a definition of happiness separate from laughter, which she believes cannot accurately express joy in its association with hostile mocking. She notes, "There are more ways than one of being happy, better perhaps to be peaceful and contented and protected, as I feel now" (22). The distance between Antoinette's understanding of happiness and the traditional expression of joy through laughter is apparent in the scene prior to her wedding to Rochester. The conflation of Rochester's dismissive laugh and his promise to protect Antoinette prompt her to call off the wedding, which she later justifies in her statement, "I didn't like the way you laughed" (46). In reference to the memory of her mother's wedding, Antoinette is aware that masculine laughter serves only to demonstrate power, not express emotion. Antoinette continues to interrogate happiness independently of laughter on several occasions: "But what about happiness, I thought at first, is there no happiness?" "Suppose you took this happiness away when I wasn't looking," "I am not used to happiness...It makes me afraid" (34, 55). However, following the arrival of her husband and a possible threat to her authority, she abandons her stoic state for a series of experiments with laughter.

Antoinette's careful, calculated laughter functions not as an indication of her pleasure, but rather as a strategic testing of masculine forms of emotional expression and a negotiation of power dynamics in her marriage. In the early conversation in which Rochester laughs dismissively about the suffering destined for all beautiful women, Antoinette's response mirrors Rochester's laugh. Her husband notes that she took up "her little fan"—a symbol of civilization and refinement—and offers a dismissive laugh that refuses to acknowledge the severity of his



claim and its implications for her future (51). Antoinette demonstrates a separate type of laughter in her conversation with Christophine regarding her plans to use obeah on Rochester. She narrates, “When I had drunk the coffee I began to laugh. ‘I have been so unhappy for nothing, nothing’” (70). By directing this laughter towards herself, Antoinette again assumes the all too familiar role of the target of laughter before being silenced by the arrival of Christophine’s tattling son. In her experimentation with still another form, Antoinette laughs to unpack her own hostility surrounding her difficult circumstances as the Creole daughter of the infamous madwoman. Following a conversation with Rochester about her family’s history, Antoinette laughs after stating that she has “tried to make [Rochester] understand. But nothing has changed” (81). Here, Antoinette acknowledges the failure of her attempts at discourse, reverting instead to laughter, a method of communication that has proven effective in conveying meaning so many times before. She assumes the role of the ex-slaves, mocking Rochester’s inability to comprehend her struggles and to fit in to the history of Jamaica. However, in overstepping the boundaries of emotional expression drawn for her gender, she is immediately silenced by Rochester’s command to not “laugh like that” (81). In the absence of female models for these forms of laughter, Antoinette’s efforts to master various forms of masculine laughter are ineffective, damaging to herself, or promptly silenced.

It is in the aftermath of these failed experiences with masculine laughter and at the height of discord in her turbulent marriage that Antoinette opts for the single form of expression left unexplored. When Rochester states with finality that he does not and cannot love his wife, Antoinette overcomes her internal desire to be a proper, submissive, English wife, abandons her childhood belief that happiness is attainable when separated from laughter, and avoids any further suppression of her emotions by laughing, as Rochester describes, “A crazy laugh” (89).

Mirroring the choice of her predecessor, Antoinette uses mad laughter to record her final narrative.

Antoinette's final relationship to laughter occupies her muddled thoughts in the attic at Thornfield. As Antoinette listens to her caretaker's conversations outside of her bedroom, she writes: "I listen but I cannot understand what they say. So there is still the sound of whispering that I have heard all my life, but these are different voices" (107). Drawing on memories of her past experiences, Antoinette signals her failure to comprehend discourse even now, a form of expression that has proven far less diverse in style, discriminatory in user, and effective in her own life than laughter. Similarly, she reveals a continued mistrust and misunderstanding of emotional expression. Following a visit from her step-brother, who looks unrecognizingly at the woman whose oppression he helped to orchestrate, Antoinette asks her caretaker, "What do you do when something happens to you like that?" (109). Here, her bewilderment indicates the residue of every failed attempt to communicate her emotions in a way deemed adequate by her mother, the ex-slaves, and her husband. In this absence of distinguishable conversations and an empathetic audience at Thornfield, Antoinette clings to a lifetime of lessons in laughter, a familiar form of expression associated with agency and control when employed or responded to appropriately. She is at times cognizant of the laughter of other members of the household, "When I took the keys and went into the passage I heard them laughing and talking in the distance," and at times aware of a haunting, all-consuming laughter, "All the people who had been staying in the house had gone...but it seemed to me that someone was following me, someone was chasing me, laughing" (108, 111). The dismissive, oppressive, mocking, and emotive forms of this expression converge in Part Three, becoming an inescapable track that incites Antoinette's desperate attempts to unravel and categorize each form. This agenda is clear

in her interrogations of Grace Poole, her caretaker and only connection with the outside world. In response to Poole's repeated mockery of her, Antoinette inquires, "Why are you laughing at me?" evaluating Poole's intentions in an attempt to accurately classify her derision (109). By carefully examining laughter, Antoinette seeks to superimpose the political regulations of laughter she uncovers in Jamaica onto the haunting laughter of Thornfield. However, it is this obsessive investigation that lays the foundation for the epiphany voiced in her final laugh. In her coming to terms with the circumstances of her imprisonment, her reduction to the one-dimensional exotic "other," and the futility of retaliation, Antoinette releases one final, mad laugh. In accordance with Freud's theory of laughter in the face of excess, Antoinette's laughter in the final scene is a response to the overwhelming social pressures surrounding her isolation. Her awareness of the pervasive control of patriarchal and Eurocentric ideology manifest in a cathartic release that reflects the difference between the energy expended by these forces and the insufficiencies of her own desperate attempts at reclaiming agency. However, this laughter, like the masculine laughter that overturns speech and silence, also reveals the presence of these ideologies. More critically, by acknowledging the roots of her oppression in systems of power rather than in her inherent inferiority, this laughter exposes the constructedness of white, imperial control. This is perhaps most clearly represented in the staging of her final laugh during the destruction of Thornfield, her prison and the cardboard façade of Rochester's power: "I laughed when I saw the lovely [fire] spreading so fast" (111).

Antoinette's final laugh is significant in the rarity and duality of its form. Mad laughter is both emotive and political, defying categorization as either purely emotive feminine or strategic masculine laughter. For Antoinette, this extreme form of expression is the only conceivable solution to mitigate the divide between the contradictory roles expected of her as a Victorian

colonial woman. In Rhys's narrative, mad laughter is not representative of the slow descent into insanity as suggested by nineteenth-century standards. Rather, it is the reflection of a disavowal of the traditional binary gender system, a desperate attempt to assume androgyny. However, even this radical transformation is insufficient to procure a better fate for Antoinette. Distinctly aware of the structures of power responsible for orchestrating her oppression, Rhys's heroine recognizes the futility of her laughter now more than ever. In the country of the colonizer who seeks to transplant patriarchal, imperial superiority across the span of his empire, the binary sex system constitutes an immutable truth that shapes the reality of those inside of it. Androgynous laughter is therefore inconceivable, unintelligible, and untranslatable.

It is in this state of androgyny and enlightenment that Antoinette stages her final act. Significantly, this act parallels the only memory from Antoinette's childhood in which laughter is overcome, the burning of Coulibri. Rhys superimposes the image of Coulibri onto the unfamiliar cardboard world of England, citing glimpses of "orchids and stephanotis," "the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall," and even the shouting crowd surrounding the house in Antoinette's final sighting of it, although this time replaced by the shouts of Rochester (112). In this final scene, Antoinette assumes the role of her childhood pet, Coco, a green parrot. She remembers amidst the chaos of the burning of her home, Coco's "effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching" (25). Here, Coco's wings, clipped in an act of domestication, reflect the attempts to tame Antoinette and her laughter by removing her from her homeland and incarcerating her in the cage that is Thornfield's attic. Further embodying the parrot, Antoinette imagines her hair "streamed out like wings" that "might bear [her] up...if [she] jumped to those hard stones" (112). Her choice to become Coco in her final moments stems from her memory of the effects of the parrot's death on those who set fire to her home. She

recalls, “I...remembered that it was very unlucky to kill a parrot, or even to see a parrot die. They began to go then, quickly, silently...They were not laughing anymore” (25). By transforming herself into the parrot that commands superstition and is responsible for the suspension of laughter in its death, Antoinette takes control of her final moment, responding to the provoking laugh of the ghost of Tia with a jump and a death that provides her escape from the social structure that victimizes her and places limitations on the forms of emotional expression available to her, effectively achieving the same outcome that follows *Coco*’s death. In her suicide, Antoinette silences laughter altogether.

While Antoinette’s death brings a close to her narrative, it opens a forum for discussion on the precarious position of female emotions in Victorian colonial society. The traditions of laughter demonstrated by masculine and feminine models confine both Antoinette and Rochester to the forms of expression deemed appropriate for their genders, although Antoinette more so. Rochester, Rhys’s imperial white male, shifts seamlessly between his suppression of laughter in England, the dismissive laughter of Mr. Mason that excuses his complicity in the injustice of Jamaica, and the disparaging laughter of Mr. Cosway, which reasserts his superiority over the Jamaican people and ex-slave owners. In contrast, Antoinette fails to effectively suppress her emotions, as Rochester notes, “You have never learned to hide it” (79). The models of manipulative female laughter, Amélie and Hilda, are quickly silenced in response to Rochester’s rise to power, and in Christophine’s case, never seem appropriate or consistent in Antoinette’s observations. She recalls of Christophine’s laughter, “She had a quiet voice and a quiet laugh (when she did laugh),” and later, “She threw back her head and laughed loudly. (But she never laughs loudly and why is she laughing at all?)” (12, 67). More critically, Annette, the single consistent model of female laughter, leaves her daughter with only the emotive laughter of

vulnerability and the androgynous laughter of madness that cannot convey meaning within the sexual binary.

Subjected to the hostile battleground of colonization and restricted from all productive forms of expression, Antoinette and her mother fall into a trajectory not uncommon for Victorian colonial women. Margaret Strobel has explored the prevalence of mental and emotional strain across the gender divide in the British Empire. She writes that “the rituals that comprised the life of Europeans in the colonies did not always assure emotional stability,” citing first-hand accounts that discuss the spread of acute mental diseases as an epidemic that “affected women more frequently than men” (14). Although Rhys acknowledges the dangers facing women in the social realms of the colonized state and the colonizing nations—“the world outside...can be a black and cruel world to a woman”—the emotional and psychological fissures prevalent in the experiences of the Victorian colonial woman parallel the breakdown of the colonial domestic sphere (106). Drawn between the paradoxical demands for a masculine strategic and a feminine subordinate persona, Rhys’s heroine seeks to coordinate her escape through the destruction of the ill-fitting domestic cage and a final expression intended to satiate the immense social pressures that isolate and silence her. In her attempts to redeem Bertha’s laughter in Brontë’s classic, Rhys also reconceptualizes the age-old laugh of the Victorian colonial madwoman, redeeming a history of women whose struggles toward an androgynous compromise are dismissed as hysteria and mental deterioration.

In her final act, Antoinette chooses to bring an end to her oppression as the target of laughter who is afforded no acceptable form of laughter with which to reply, effectively evading the destiny that awaited her mother. She recalls of her last visit with her mother, “I saw the man lift her up out of the chair and kiss her. I saw his mouth fasten on hers and she went all soft and

limp in his arms and he laughed” (81). By rejecting the expression that renders her mother’s last words indecipherable, Antoinette rejects any future that allows for the cycle of men exercising power over her mind and body to continue. However, her death makes for an unsettling resolution. Even in the destruction of laughter, an expression that proves far more oppressive than constructive, Rhys’s narrative has meticulously interrogated the intimate exchanges of nearly every character in order to lead us to a moment of poignant failure. When laughter is exhausted as yet another form of expression barred to the Victorian colonial woman, the system of power that condemns women to paradox remains intact. Rhys’s discourse on laughter serves to showcase the same societal and emotional constraints referenced in Strobel’s work, but her narrative does not pretend to resolve the quandary of women’s circumstances in colonial situations. Rather, Rhys complicates the original story of the burning of Thornfield. Her narrative compels readers to withdraw from the romance of Jane and Rochester and to reconsider the motives behind Antoinette’s suicide. She presents the final act of her heroine not as a vengeful attempt to retaliate against her husband’s ill-treatment and not as a haphazard result of her unstable mental state, but rather as an act of agency in which the infamous madwoman reacts against the social structure that oppresses her by silencing the form of expression she is barred from using. By focusing on the complexity of laughter and the gender boundaries that regulate it, Rhys urges audiences to revisit the mansion in Brontë’s classic, cast open the doors of the attic, and, for the first time in over a century, listen to the complex and emotionally charged narrative of Antoinette Rochester, written in the language of her laughter.

## Works Cited

- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2011. Print.
- Fayad, Mona. "Unquiet Ghosts: The Struggle for Representation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 34.3 (1998): 437-52. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.
- Flockemann, Miki. "Breakdown or Breakthrough? The Madness of Resistance in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *A Question of Power*." *MaComère* 2 (1999): 65-79. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Trans. Joyce Crick. New York: Penguin, 2003. Rpt. Leipzig and Vienna: Deuticke, 1905. Print.
- Gilchrist, Jennifer. "Women, Slavery, and the Problem of Freedom in *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 58.3 (2012): 462-94. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.
- Hall, Catherine. "Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century." *Gender and Empire*. Comp. Philippa Levine. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 46-76. Print. Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Ser.
- Kendrick, Robert. "Edward Rochester and the Margins of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 30.3 (1994): 235-56. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.
- Kim, Youngjoo. "Jean Rhys's Nameless Englishman: The Imperial Quest for English Masculinity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 11.2 (2003): 101-27. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.
- Koenen, Anne. "The Fantastic as Feminine Mode: *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Jean Rhys Review* 4.1 (1990): 15-27. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.



- Levine, Philippa. "Why Gender and Empire?" Introduction. *Gender and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 1-13. Print. Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Ser.
- Mardorossian, Carine M. "Shutting Up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Callaloo* 22.4 (1999): 1071-090. Project MUSE. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.
- Mezei, Kathy. "'And It Kept Its Secret': Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 28.4 (1987): 195-209. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.
- Pietrzak-Franger, Monika. "Silencing the Male: Rochester's Muteness." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 7.1 (2008): 11-32. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.
- Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Ed. Judith Raiskin. New York: W. W. Norton &, 1999. Print.
- Strobel, Margaret. *European Women and the Second British Empire*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. Print. Midland Book.
- Van Neck-Yoder, Hilda. "Colonial Desires, Silence, and Metonymy: 'All Things Considered' in *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 40.2 (1998): 184-208. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.

## Chapter Two

“My pain comes when I laugh”: Gendered and Racialized Laughter in Johnston’s *Fool’s Sanctuary*

Two decades after Rhys’s publication of an alternative narrative for Antoinette Mason Rochester, Irish writer Jennifer Johnston revisits and reimagines Shakespeare’s iconic colonial narrative, *The Tempest*. Set at the height of the Irish War of Independence, *Fool’s Sanctuary* captures the fragmentation of the Anglo-Irish Martin family, whose allegiance is drawn between king and country and whose heroine struggles to locate a space for female articulation both as a character and narrator. While Miranda’s circumstances prompt her to embrace changing gender dynamics in order to become a “modern” girl, Johnston’s narrative conjures the ghost of the restrictive Victorian colonial archetype and redeploys the motif of laughter central to Rhys’s work. Surfacing in an environment of significant racial, cultural, and gender tension generated by the trauma of English colonialism, laughter again proves critical to the construction and maintenance of power dynamics between the laughing subject and the comedic, racialized object. This chapter will argue that Johnston’s representation of laughter as a policed and ultimately privileged form of communication serves as a commentary on the affective suppression of Cathal as a native Irish Catholic man and, to a greater extent, Miranda as an Anglo-Irish woman isolated geographically, barred from political discussion, and silenced by domestic constraints on the female voice. Breaking away from the rigid system of modeling developed in the previous analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this chapter will examine the recurrence of types of laughter discussed in the previous section before investigating the development of new forms and comedic characters such as the joker and the fool. By exploring variations in the types of laughter available to her characters based on their demographics, Johnston creates a narrative

that considers the flexibility and political significance of laughter while exposing the constancy of female affective suppression across space and time.

Scholars of gender and empire examine representations of Anglo-Irish and native Irish Catholic women in colonial domestic spheres, particularly exploring the impact of national politics on twentieth-century gender roles. The reconstruction of Irish colonial domestic space for novel political and social purposes during colonization and the ensuing struggle for independence necessitated a re-creation of colonial identity for women. As in the Caribbean, however, the politicization of Irish domestic space foregrounded paradoxical roles for colonial women, simultaneously necessitating the rise of the female political agent responsible for securing cultural superiority and the perpetuation of the hearth angel, the submissive helpmate of mythical proportion. The contradiction of female colonial gender roles and the affective forms associated with them reintroduced the domestic sphere as an inhospitable space for women, invalidating both political expression and silence. Richard Kearney and others analyze the movement of masculine politics into isolated feminine spaces as a reaction to the infiltration of public forums by British forces. Understanding colonization as the point of initial trauma that incites centuries of being “uprooted and alienated...from our original sense of ourselves,” Kearney argues that Irish husbands, politicians, and artists rebranded the domestic sphere as a site of production for idyllic “myth, tradition, piety and martyrdom” that rallied feelings of nationalism and a renewed commitment to the foundational elements of Irish culture (74, 69). However, this call to adopt responsibility for the emotional, psychological, and cultural well-being of a nation necessitated a secondary colonization at the expense of Anglo-Irish and native Irish Catholic women. Kearney notes that the historically submissive archetype of the Irish domestic woman produced a population of “slaves of slaves” ideal for redemption in the form of

a romantic victim and siren for war of mythical, pseudo-spiritual consequence (76). At the start of the twentieth century, Kearney identifies a transformation of the individual “passive daughter” into the communal and “militant guise of a mother goddess summoning her faithful sons to rise up against the infidel invader so that through the sacrificial shedding of their blood, she might be miraculously redeemed from colonial violation and become free and pure again” (77). As David Cairns and Shaun Richards note, the elevation of Irish women to asexual mythical status also paralleled a desire to resist the characterization of Irish men as effeminate by instating a culture of “hypermasculinity” void of both subversive and submissive female subjects (130-131). Doubly victimized by British colonizing forces and by Irish masculine politics, Anglo-Irish and native Irish Catholic women during this period were resigned to abstraction, complicating their experiences of political reality and eliminating the possibility of alternative identities.

In response to historical limitations on the narratives of Anglo-Irish and native Irish Catholic women, scholarship on Irish women writers has historically concerned itself with the issue of female self-identification during periods of political turmoil. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews identifies a common narrative of decolonization and demythologizing of the “sacralised feminine sites of domestic, creative or sexual privacy” from the “brutalizing agents of the public world” (225). Tracing the trajectory of the realistic and re-empowered Irish woman, Kennedy-Andrews notes that the archetype of the mythical Mother becomes consumed by the “dream of an unconditioned life free from the controls of patriarchy, parenthood and politics” in women’s writing (231).

With reference to the findings of these scholars, Laila Kahn, in particular, contributes valuable insight into issues of gender, empire, and female redemption in the works of Jennifer Johnston. Detailing the implications of politicizing the Irish domestic sphere, Kahn argues that

Anglo-Irish and native Irish Catholic women inhabited a position of inevitable victimization in the affairs of men. Women, she notes, were simultaneously “re-possessed by the nation against the foreign invader” as objects of political capital while being charged with the “stabilization of identity” and the blood sacrifices of Irish youth. Reminiscent of gender dynamics in Victorian colonial environments, expectations for appropriate Irish womanhood proved rigidly drawn between contradictory ideals of the woman as a submissive domestic object and a critical political figure, a paradox complicated further by the ambiguous political state of the domestic sphere. Kahn’s reading of Johnston’s novels suggests a strategic departure from the unresolvable complex of colonial Irish womanhood by “dismantl[ing] nationalist modes of motherhood” that are reproductive of men’s politics and exploring “alternative approaches to friendships and family bonds that could exist when women reject nationalist narratives.” This intersection of domestic paradox and the creation of alternative narratives provides a useful lens for understanding the position of Miranda Martin at the opening of *Fool’s Sanctuary* and context for the historical precedent behind her final decision.

In addition to representations of women and domestic space, scholars of empire have investigated the impact of cultural and racial difference on the treatment of colonized bodies. Separated by geographic distance and the presence of a distinct color line, Rhys’s and Johnston’s heroines appear initially to diverge in their experience of racialization. However, an investigation of Irish constructions of race and class reveal striking similarities in the treatment of colonized bodies between colonies. Challenging the omission of Ireland from postcolonial discourse, C.L. Innes argues that the uniformity of skin color between native Irish Catholics, Anglo-Irish citizens, and imperial forces did little to hinder the construction of new racial categories predicated on cultural and class divides rather than phenotypic appearance. Rather, she argues,

the constellation of social and economic privileges that determined “the degree of choice available to [Irish citizens] when it came to declaring an Irish or non-Irish identity” also produced “a full spectrum of ‘othered’ and ‘othering’ subjects” stratified by constructions of racial inequity rather than an intractable visual divide (Innes 27, 29). Citizens who “spoke Irish, adhered to Irish culture or dress, or married an Irish person,” she argues, were “driven ‘beyond the Pale’” (Innes 26). Satnam Virdee traces a similar trajectory of racializing Irish persons, specifically Irish Catholic citizens, centuries before the time of the Irish Troubles. He notes that the oppression experienced by Irish persons during the War for Independence undoubtedly derived in part from “racism that had conceived them as the ‘wild Irish’ and ‘natural savages’ incapable of civilization” (23). Virdee argues that the construction of an “inferior Celtic race” intersected with prevailing prejudices against lower class workers of African descent, resulting in the perception of Irish persons as culturally and physical distinct from imperial populations (24). Responsible for further disparity in English and Irish relations, efforts to racialize colonized bodies remain critical to understanding the complexity of power dynamics in colonial narratives.

In colonial environments, the subjugation of women in a patriarchal social structure parallels the subjugation of racialized colonized populations during periods of political turmoil. In Johnston’s novel, characters rooted in Irish ancestry bear the burden of racialized bodies and, in turn, racialized affective opportunities. The effects of the prejudices surrounding Gaelic ancestry appear most significantly in the characterization of Cathal who garners still more condemnation for his role in the Irish Republican Army. However, Johnston investigates the height of social, cultural, and affective subjugation in her examination of the life of Miranda. As a colonial woman, Miranda bears the responsibility of the mythical Mother figure of Irish nationalism as a result of her upbringing in Mr. Martin’s idyllic nationalist sanctuary

concurrently with Andrew's and Harry's expectations of her transition into the silent, submissive wife of imperial design. Still more problematic, however, Miranda bears the stigma of racialization in her association with Irish ancestry and with her native Irish Catholic lover, Cathal. As such, Miranda's capacity for affective expression must simultaneously espouse the script of masculine nationalist rhetoric, adhere to the quiet, trivial conversation of the imperial woman, and abide by the boundaries of expression drawn for racialized bodies, producing impossible expectations for expression that result in Miranda's traumatic fragmentation as a character and as a narrator. Johnston explores the resulting struggle for coherence and power in the exchange of laughter, an expression divorced from speech and capable of political subversion. The insight of scholars of gender, race, identity, and empire brings new significance to the role of these issues in Johnston's work.

Scholarship on Johnston routinely addresses themes that recur throughout her work and makes use of biographical elements from her letters and interviews rather than investigating the complexities of her individual novels. Indeed, *Fool's Sanctuary* has yet to be addressed independently of her other works. However, criticism on Johnston's broad treatment of gender, colonial space, and narrative style offers insightful implications for closer readings of this novel. Much of the criticism on gender in Johnston's novels investigates the politics of public and domestic spheres. In contrast to the traditional depiction of masculine and feminine space, Rachael Sealy Lynch argues that Johnson's work illustrates a complex interplay of "damaging...cross-currents" that render personal and political agendas incapable of being "neatly separated and labeled" (250, 259). In a constant state of invasion by "Irish social, religious, and political realities," the domestic sphere and the feminine identities predicated on its isolation become compromised and even "dangerous to maintain" (251). Heather Ingman

suggests that Miranda's narrative serves as a subversive reaction to this encroachment of masculine narratives by "pulsing against the symbolic order" as a way of "counter[ing] the heroic myths which have grown up around male violence" (339). However, in Shari Benstock's reading, Miranda's attempts to produce a powerful female narrative arrive too late. Johnston's focus on the plight of the artist, she claims, results in a "male world" that fully appropriates the "enclosed spaces that have so meticulously been described by women novelists writing about women" (216, 215). By contextualizing the affairs of her male characters in a national setting that is "closed, suffocated, lonely, and inward-turning," Benstock suggests that Johnston renders public space "specifically feminine," eradicating the gendered division of space and, perhaps, seizing any space left available for women (216). These critics have done important work articulating the precarious balance of masculine and feminine space and political influence in Johnston's novels.

Conscious of the effects of the increasingly volatile domestic sphere, other critics concentrate on the struggle for Johnston's heroines to establish new identities for themselves. Felicity Rosslyn argues that the majority of Johnston's female characters share a similar trajectory of growth motivated by their attempts to determine their loyalty to colonist or colonized as well as "what loyalty would mean under such confusing circumstances" ("Nonsense" 109). Further, she argues that Johnston's accounts of "female dilemmas and [the]...price of social and sexual hypocrisy in modern Ireland" necessitate creative forms of political affiliation for the author herself ("Nonsense" 106). Lynch makes a similar claim, referring to *Fool's Sanctuary* specifically in her argument that the "development of individual female consciousness" resides at the core of Miranda's coming-of-age experience (256).



In contrast to these interpretations, however, Klaus Lubbers asserts that Miranda's isolated upbringing in the Anglo-Irish aristocracy leaves her with a rigid sense of identity that renders her incapable of adapting and transforming in order to save herself from "the brutality endemic to Irish history" (234). Marit Berge's analysis supports this claim, tracing Miranda's concept of self from her early association with her father, in which she "feels she has no independent self," to her later seclusion in Termon, where she chooses to identify with "the ghosts of the past" rather than "step[ping] out of her sanctuary into the adult world of fear and violence" (24). Although these critics disagree about the effectiveness of Miranda's transformation, they offer convincing arguments regarding women's search for more agentic representation in Johnston's novels.

Narrowing further to investigate Miranda's specific responses to social and political upheaval, other critics analyze the rhetorical strategies used in her narration and dialogue. Noting Johnston's respect for the autonomy of her characters' voices, Rosslyn argues that "Johnston seems to hear her characters rather than see them" ("Importance" 240). Ingman makes a similar observation in her analysis of Miranda's "fragmented ramblings interspersed with songs and quotations" (337). However, she argues that these scattered attempts to communicate only serve to reflect the powerless "semiotic haze of dreams" in which the older Miranda resides (340). José Lanter extends this argument, suggesting that Johnston's novel hinges on "the breakdown of communications between people in general and in Ireland in particular" (211). Lanter cites Miranda's desperate attempt to incorporate "layers of allusions" to the Bible and Shakespeare as well as nursery rhymes and "noises of all kind" into meaningful patterns of self-expression (210, 218). Ultimately, however, he asserts that Miranda suffers from a crippling "lack of human communication and of meaningful relations between people" as well as "the knowledge that in

this life each person is fundamentally alone,” which triggers “a kind of death in itself” (221). In their analysis of Miranda’s communicatory style, these critics begin to make insightful claims regarding the relationship between female oppression and limited expressive forms.

Although scholars have investigated the roles of gender identity, colonial space, and rhetorical strategies in Johnston’s novel, they have neglected to identify the critical link at which these arguments intersect: gendered and racialized affective expression. In colonial environments, the rigid racial and gender dynamics of affective expression prove central to the construction of identity, which, in turn, determines the subject’s ability to navigate political and domestic space. Further, arguments that focus solely on the expression of gender identity in traditional speech and rhetorical strategies can invalidate the identity work of marginalized groups, whose subversive acts feature most prominently in affective communication. In *Fool’s Sanctuary*, Johnston highlights the centrality of affective expression in her investigation of laughter. By associating various forms of laughter with characters across the gender binary and the spectrum of imperial, colonial, and colonized cultures, Johnston develops patterns that illustrate a strict hierarchy of political forms of laughter. In doing so, she contributes to a critical conversation about the precarious position of colonial women and colonized bodies in the exchange of laughing subjects and comedic objects. Additionally, Johnston produces a narrative that foregrounds affective subversion by marginalized groups and reconsiders the circumstances and actions of Shakespeare’s colonial heroine.

Drawing on the precedents of masculine Victorian colonial laughter, Johnston initially examines the willfully uncomprehending laugh of the Irish landed gentry, exemplified by Anglo-Irish patriarch Mr. Martin. Like Mr. Mason in Rhys’s work and Prospero before him, Mr. Martin subscribes to the idyllic fantasy of a peaceful island nation partially controlled by his own

paternal guidance. However, his reluctance to confront the complicity of his fortune and status in the system of political injustice against the Irish people prompts him to develop a reclusive, cryptic, and dismissive nature. In the exposition of the narrative, Miranda indicates her father's detachment from the building political tension by describing him as "cocooned from the world by his own dreams" and, indeed, even incapable of acknowledging the literal decay of Termon, which could "fall down and he wouldn't notice" (15, 12). Similarly, Andrew's lectures on Ireland's perilous position after the Great War elicit immediate denial from his father who corrects Andrew's use of "[s]uch strange words...This country is in a state of evolution and you use the words stunted and stifled" (39). Here, Mr. Martin corrects even the connotation of Andrew's language in an effort to rewrite the narrative of Ireland's future to correspond with his vision. In addition to his political detachment, Mr. Martin fails to address the severity of the class conflict between the Anglo-Irish and native Irish Catholic citizens in his relationship with Mr. Dillon and in his reluctance to acknowledge his own wealth. Miranda notes that despite her father's inability to refer to Mr. Dillon by his first name—a habit that indicates his knowledge of the class divide as well as his partial adherence to social protocol—Mr. Martin seemed to share "the same dreams" and "the same tragedies," later even referring to himself as "common" and a "peasant" as he selects between multiple sets of coffee cups (47, 55). In his attempts to alleviate his own cognitive dissonance by physically isolating himself and avoiding incriminating language, Mr. Martin relies on intentionally uncomprehending laughter to dismiss the events of the war. Following the arrival of Andrew and Harry, whose presence signals the arrival of the war at Termon, Mr. Martin's laughter erupts primarily in response to indications of his family's involvement in the political turmoil. When Harry infers from the estate's wealth of military paraphernalia that the Martins are "a b-bloodthirsty lot," Mr. Martin quickly laughs before

correcting him: "I am a farmer" (35). Similarly, when Miranda expresses concern for their safety at Termon and asks to lock the door, Mr. Martin "shook his head and laughed," having clarified in an earlier scene that the house should always remain open, "welcoming, truly a sanctuary," in keeping with the original meaning of its name (137, 114). Despite having received Cathal's news about the impending actions of the IRA, in this scene, Mr. Martin uses laughter to invalidate Miranda's concerns. By relying on laughter not to release but to avoid the tension brought on by the political and cultural divide, Mr. Martin functions as an exemplar of the dismissive laughter of the white colonial patriarch.

Mr. Martin's adherence to his uncomprehending attitude, however, fails to adequately convince Miranda of his detachment. Indeed, in a series of scenes relayed through Miranda's own observations, Miranda notes the careful calculation behind Mr. Martin's laughter. After Andrew initially questions his father's involvement with Cathal, Miranda states that Mr. Martin "sighed, and then thinking better of the sigh, he turned and smiled briefly in Harry's direction" (36). Additionally, Mr. Martin avoids further discussion of Cathal by quickly moving into a description of his recent drainage project and stating: "I am a schemer. Haha" (36). Here, Miranda's use of "Haha" to signify her father's laughter rather than the use of the word "laughed" followed or preceded by a descriptor violates the uniformity of laughter throughout the remainder of the narrative and implies the performative nature of this moment. In the absence of genuine laughter, Mr. Martin imitates the sounds of laughter when defending his career and affiliation with Cathal to Harry, an officer of the opposing political faction, as if to dismiss again his involvement in the political turmoil. Miranda later solidifies the performativity of his detachment by including Mr. Martin's brief description of Termon as a "fool's sanctuary," indicating his knowledge of the unrealistic nature of his aspirations for the estate and the

imminent danger faced by his family (114). In an effort to deny the state of political turmoil in Ireland and his complicity in it, Mr. Martin adopts a dismissive form of laughter available to members of the landed gentry. Although his death at the close of the narrative brings an end to the generation of characters who function as stable representations of a single form of laughter, his uncomprehending and dismissive style of laughter is temporarily passed down, as by inheritance, to his heir.

Separated from Mr. Martin by a generation and by his conflicting ties to both king and country, Andrew Martin's use of laughter proves far more complex in motive and diverse in form than his father's. However, after a childhood spent in the sanctuary of Termon, Andrew initially modifies and deploys the detached and dismissive attitude modeled by the Anglo-Irish patriarch. A soldier and "glorified spy" of the English armed forces, Andrew is severely critical of the Irish movement for independence, cynical towards his father's romantic plans for peaceful land reclamation, and reluctant to associate himself with his Anglo-Irish ancestry for fear of appearing sympathetic towards the Irish cause (133). Prior to his initial return to Termon, the narrator, focalized through Andrew's thoughts, makes reference to this detachment from his family, home, and country. Finding Miranda greatly changed and his father more removed from reality than before, Andrew laments: "I should have had sense and listened to the voices in my head. Steer clear of Termon. The voices of sense...Oh God, I thought by now I'd have been able to cope with my own emotions" (32). Here, Andrew signals the psychological tension produced by the enchanting but ultimately unrealistic nature of Termon's sanctuary, which troubles his mastery over his own affective behavior and threatens his loyalty to the crown. However, Andrew's conflicted emotional state does not initially manifest itself in a series of uncontrollable emotive turns as he fears, but rather in the careful repression of emotion entirely. Mr. Martin

indicates Andrew's affective distance in an early conversation. After describing the intimate details of his recent land re-development project, Mr. Martin states: "You have no idea how exciting it is to see new land thriving. Thriving. I think even you will feel something" (37). Here, Mr. Martin attempts to foreshadow the success of Irish independence by evoking images of the natural reclamation of Irish land. However, his assertion that "even [Andrew]" might be forced to emote when presented with "thriving" new land alienates his son as an extreme example of repressed affect and distances him from the nationalist mission. Like his father before him, Andrew suppresses emotion in order to avoid the full impact of the war even while he invests himself intellectually in the political debate. In doing so, Andrew's repressive tendencies allow him to briefly subscribe to a protective fantasy that validates the English cause and minimizes his role in the violence at Termon.

Although Andrew initially seeks to preserve his loyalty to the Unionist agenda by silencing all emotion, increasing cognitive dissonance prompts him to abandon his repressive tendencies, finding temporary release in the affective form made available to him by his father and by his privileged status as a rising patriarch in the Anglo-Irish landed gentry: dismissive laughter. Andrew's use of dismissive laughter surfaces early in the narrative in response to the collision of his commitment to preserving English colonialism and his captivation with romantic childhood memories of Ireland. In the opening scene in which Andrew's friend and comrade, Harry Harrington, declares his affection for Miranda as an example of "love at first sight," Andrew laughs "a delighted vigorous laugh" before aligning love with a series of what he perceives to be fantastical notions: "ghosts or fairies or life after death" (33). Similarly, when Harry repeats his declaration—"I think I have fallen in love with your sister"—Andrew responds with a laugh before implying that his friend is "suffering from illusions" (33). In both instances,

Harry's remarks imply a breach of the divide between worlds, a meeting of the English sensibility represented by Harry and the surreal nature of Ireland represented by a whimsical Miranda and her connection to vulnerable emotional states. Andrew's laughter in combination with his sarcastic remarks functions as an attempt to invalidate and dismiss the suggested unity of Harry and Miranda, ushering his conceptions of family and duty back to their respective, compartmentalized spaces. In a similar instance, Andrew rejects a comparison between himself and childhood friend Cathal in a scene that threatens to rupture Andrew's carefully constructed identity. During a tense lunch including the Martin family, Harry, and Cathal, Mr. Martin suggests that Cathal's persistent skepticism bears closer similarity to Andrew's character than to that of his benefactor. Andrew, however, immediately "laugh[s] good-humoredly" before stating that he is only "a bit sceptical" in an attempt to differentiate himself from Cathal (79). Here, Andrew's dismissive laughter serves to ridicule and reject his conflation with Cathal, a native Irish Catholic and member of the Irish Republican Army, who represents the nationalistic love of country that Andrew seeks to repress. In a final instance of dismissive laughter, Andrew discredits his father's lifelong commitment to land reclamation by describing his work as a "fantasy of trees and drains" (128). However, when Harry suggests that Andrew unjustly oversimplifies his father's work because he does not "know what [he's] talking about," Andrew responds with a laugh (128). Here, Andrew laughs to simultaneously dismiss the possibility that his father's efforts are motivated by legitimate ethical and political concerns and to discredit the notion that his own life's work in opposition to the nationalist movement has been unjustly founded. By refusing to acknowledge information that jeopardizes the coherence of his own political narrative, Andrew embodies the calculated behavior and dismissive laughter of his father.

However, although Andrew's intentionally uncomprehending laughter functions as an initial defense mechanism against the collision of English and Irish culture, the approach of violent warfare to Termon in combination with Andrew's desires to differentiate himself from his father—"I don't want to be like you"—necessitate his adoption of a new form of laughter entirely (106). Despite the absence of masculine models in the novel, Andrew responds to a new "world [that] is no longer as simple as [his father] think[s] it is" with the historically disparaging laugh of white imperial superiority (144). A son of Ireland by birth and a product of English schooling and military in his adulthood, Andrew's loyalties straddle the divide between colonist and colonized, allowing him to develop a more creative identity that exceeds the limitations of the archetypal characters representative of the polarized nationalist and Unionist factions. As a result, Andrew's laughter demonstrates his privileged liminal status, seamlessly transitioning between his father's dismissive laughter and the laughter of white imperial superiority demonstrated by English patriarchs before him. Indeed, the narrative's first example of disparaging imperial laughter illustrates the divide between father and son as Andrew exposes the tension in their relationship: "Such a gentle voice [father] has. Son, son, son. That makes me laugh. He never said that. Fantasy voice, that one is" (33). Here, Andrew attempts to position his father as the comedic object by describing Mr. Martin's voice in un-authoritative and dreamlike terms as "gentle" and later fantastical in contrast to the direct and militaristic tone deployed by Andrew throughout the narrative. Similarly, Andrew describes Mr. Martin's inadequacies as a father by suggesting that the term "son" is the product of a "fantasy voice" rather than reality, simultaneously challenging Mr. Martin's role as a patriarch and distancing himself from an Irish ancestry that never directly claimed him as a "son." Andrew's laughter in this instance functions to solidify his father's comedic status and to posit his own voice as authoritative in place of Mr.



Martin's. Similarly, Andrew deploys disparaging laughter to invalidate decades of work by his father. When Mr. Martin shares his intentions to present his research to the Irish public, Andrew "laughed" before asking, "Who the hell will care?" (76). Here again, Andrew's laughter places him in a position of authority as the laughing subject, making possible the subsequent statement in which Andrew undermines the significance of his father's work and attempts to shatter Mr. Martin's understanding of himself as a revolutionary. This systematic ridicule of Anglo-Irish sympathizers translates to greater ridicule in Andrew's treatment of Cathal, a native Irish Catholic. Dually insulted by Cathal's political affiliations and his intimate relationship with Miranda, Andrew uses the tense dining scene at Termon and the final departure scene to reinstate the racial and social hierarchy that strips Cathal of his agency. Here, the laughter of white imperial superiority reaches full effect. During their lunch together, Andrew interrogates Cathal's academic pursuits. However, when Cathal asserts that he is studying philosophy, the narrator notes: "There was a moment's silence, then Andrew threw back his head and laughed," before describing philosophy as a "lot of damn fool words" (82). Similarly, at the novel's close, Cathal's assertion that he is "a Commandant of the Irish Republican Army" triggers Andrew's instinct to "laug[h] delightedly" (127). In both instances, Andrew's laughter functions as an attempt to punish Cathal's efforts to exceed the social and educational possibilities set for native Irish Catholic citizens by imperialist standards. By suggesting that Cathal's studies amount to little more than "fool words," Andrew renders him an illegitimate academic and, later, an illegitimate soldier in a military force unrecognized by the crown. The appearance of laughter in both scenes indicates the political nature of this form of expression and its necessary role in establishing power dynamics between the comedic, racialized object and the laughing, imperialist subject. Following the precedents of the colonialist patriarchs before him, Andrew

relies on disparaging laughter in his efforts to construct authority over his father and friend and to reaffirm his loyalty to the Unionist mission.

Although Andrew invests in white imperial laughter for the greater part of the narrative, he transitions into a final, more vulnerable form of laughter in two brief but critical scenes in the latter half of the narrative, introducing a genuine, introspective laughter that exposes the full extent of Andrew's affective capacity. Prior to the lunch at Termon, Andrew and Miranda, in the company of Harry, revisit their childhood pastime, riding horses through the Irish countryside from dawn until noon. Although the narrator omits detailed description of this outing, she states in summary: "We laughed in the light and shade, insubstantial laughter, that the wind shook away like the calling of the sea birds, forever lost" (78). Outside of the politically charged domestic sphere and temporarily separated from his duties as an English officer, Andrew appears to abandon his calculating approach to dismissive and disparaging forms of laughter in order to adopt a carefree and, perhaps, genuinely affective form of laughter. By describing this expression as "insubstantial," the narrator implies that this laugh does not seek to reinstate power dynamics or serve political motives as previous forms do, but rather appears in the moment to be "shook away... forever lost." Indeed, the use of the plural pronoun "we" also implies that Andrew, Miranda, and Harry deploy this form of laughter in equal measure, denoting its ability to transcend class and gender barriers in contrast to political, traditionally masculine, laughter. A similar form of laughter also erupts at the close of the narrative before Andrew's final departure from Termon. When Cathal recalls a number of memories from their childhood together, Andrew "laughed suddenly" before offering memories of his own (130). In this instance, the narrator's use of the word "suddenly" suggests an abrupt injunction to laugh rather than a premeditated political response. Additionally, Andrew's resolution to relive the events of his

childhood after years of affective repression and a concerted effort to reject his Anglo-Irish ancestry indicates an uncharacteristic laugh of pleasure. Significantly, however, this form of laughter surfaces exclusively in times of intense vulnerability for the laughing subject. While out riding, Andrew removes himself from the walls of Termon, the Big House that has become center stage for the performance of his new identity as a militaristic patriarch directed by reason and loyal to the crown and social hierarchy. Thus, the appearance of genuine affect outside of the context of Termon invalidates and exposes the constructed nature of Andrew's conception of self. Similarly, Andrew's uncharacteristic laughter at the close of the novel appears inside of Termon but at a moment of crisis in the estate's history. Now a site of violence in the war, Termon's identity as a sanctuary and political stronghold collapses, rendering Andrew's carefully constructed anti-nationalist identity ineffective. Significantly, this sudden rupturing of the physical and political restraints of the Big House also provides space for Andrew's final words and brief display of compassion toward Cathal: "Come with us, Charlie" (136). Ultimately, although the dismissive laughter of his father and the imperial laughter of his English upbringing provide political advantages for Andrew, Johnston's use of this final form casts the genuine laughter of pleasure as a vulnerable but, perhaps, also a subversive form of laughter that produces the kinship bonds necessary to stifle violent conflict.

Although Andrew's experimentation with various forms of laughter attests to his creative and privileged position as a member of the Anglo-Irish class, the available variations of laughter appear to even greater effect for the narrative's self-proclaimed comic, Harry. "[E]xpensively educated" and heir to a wealthy English family, Harry functions as the narrative's true imperial male (72). Unaffected by the ancestral ties to Ireland that haunt Andrew and consume the life of Mr. Martin, Harry modifies the uncomprehending laughter of his Anglo-Irish counterparts to

dismiss the trauma of colonialism and to preserve his fantastical, exoticized perception of the country and of Miranda. In a private conversation at Termon, Miranda's description of her political opinions regarding national freedom and social welfare prompts Harry to respond with laughter before noting that "like most Irish people I've ever met you just talk on and on about things you don't understand very well" (51). Further, Harry states: "you seem as a race to have this capacity for turning feeling into fantasy, and then you all get so worked up" (51). In this instance, Harry's laughter appears at a crucial moment prior to his criticism of Miranda, dismissing and discrediting the opinions provided by the Anglo-Irish heroine in order to rewrite the narrative of English colonialism and cast Irish citizens as the woefully ungrateful and unaware colonized subjects. Ironically, although Harry dismisses Miranda's assertion that English colonial occupation produces unfavorable living conditions and a divided political state, his own description of the political ignorance of "most Irish people" reinforces the racial and social divide between Irish citizens and colonial forces. In a similar appearance of dismissive laughter, Harry attempts to mitigate the violent trauma of war brought on by colonialism. When Miranda states that she carries "the whole weight of this war tied round my heart like a stone," Harry laughs "with unease" before briefly chastising her: "This a w-war? My dear girl there's nothing for you to worry about" (52). Here, the narrator's description of Harry's laugh as "uneas[y]" exposes his discomfort with the idea of Miranda impacted by the ongoing turmoil and, therefore, altered from her enchanting, whimsical, and exotic state. However, it also demonstrates Harry's refusal to acknowledge English colonialism and the IRA's guerilla uprising as constitutive of a legitimate war. The narrator provides support for this claim in a later passage outlining the trauma of Harry's experiences in World War I. When explaining a recurring nightmare to Miranda, Harry "laugh[s] suddenly" after describing "[s]ome men whose

faces I've never seen before and men who I...and m-men...and m-men...thousands of them...all going out" (65). Here, Harry again resorts to dismissive laughter to avoid critical engagement with the atrocities of war-related violence. Significantly, however, his acknowledgment of the nightmare's frequent resurfacing suggests that uncomprehending laughter cannot effectively dismiss Harry's trauma, only temporarily redirect his attention.

Although Harry deploys uncomprehending laughter in similar fashion to Andrew and Mr. Martin before him, his privileged status as a member of the wealthy, English, imperialist class provides him with a more extensive range and more effective forms of laughter. Newly aware of the inadequacies of his own uncomprehending laugh, Harry transitions into a repressive treatment of laughter that sets the stage for his increasing control over this expression as the narrative progresses. Harry's initial experimentation with the suppression of laughter begins as early as his first interaction with Miranda. When Miranda laughs during Harry's introduction, attributing the outburst to his "funny name," Harry states that the similarity between his first and surname may be "possibly a little humorous" before asserting that "people get used to it quite quickly" (26). In this instance, Harry's remarks arise in opposition to Miranda's attempts to identify him as a comedic object, but more significantly, to protect the authority of the English name that establishes his privileged status. The use of diminutive and qualifying language in Harry's initial response—"possibly" and "a little"—serves to mitigate the effect of Miranda's joke and to set the stage for the subtle cautionary statement to follow: "people get used to it quite quickly." Here, Harry's assertion functions as token of advice for Miranda to repress her laughter, a sentiment that grows more explicit in the scenes to follow. Harry's interaction with Miranda after their return to Termon offers an additional instance of repression. When Harry discovers Miranda's superior talent for playing the piano, he refuses to display his own skills

until Miranda agrees to “[c]ross her heart and hope to die” rather than laugh (43). Additionally, Harry repeatedly halts his performance, notably after making mistakes, to remind Miranda of his warning: “Now please don’t laugh” and “if you l-laugh or even smile I’ll stop at once” (45, 44). By silencing Miranda, Harry counters his vulnerable position as the weaker player and exercises his authority as the superior laughing subject. In his efforts to maintain the gendered and racialized power dynamic of their relationship, Harry literally occupies the space for Miranda’s disparaging laughter with instructions for the appropriate time of expression and form of affect available to her. By choosing to silence her laughter rather than her speech, Harry exposes his knowledge of the dangerous social and political potential of this expressive form. Additionally, by transitioning from a passive, dismissive form of laughter to the active repression of the laughter of others, Harry carves out a position of power for himself in the exchange of comedic objects and laughing subjects.

Despite Harry’s attempts to affirm his authority by silencing subversive female laughter, his inability to suppress the laughter of the Anglo-Irish men necessitates another development in his affective strategy. Unable to effectively defend his position as a laughing subject or to avoid becoming a comedic object, Harry inhabits a liminal affective role: the fool. In Johnston’s narrative, the fool dominates the exchange of laughter by carefully evoking, controlling, and manipulating the laughter of others. Significantly, this role proves accessible only to characters who possess the imperial superiority and gendered privilege to navigate through all available forms of laughter without fear of repudiation. Harry’s role as the fool initially materializes in a series of calculated jokes. During the tense scene at the piano, Harry prefaces his playing by stating that “His majesty doesn’t supply Steinways to the mess,” prompting Miranda to “laug[h] and...becko[n] him to her side” (42). Here, Harry’s joke functions simultaneously to excuse his

inferior musical skills and to disarm Miranda's attempts to expose him to ridicule. By provoking Miranda's laughter in response to a joke, Harry exercises his control over her affective capacities and appropriates her expression into a form of praise that compliments the success of the joke, and by extension, his authority as a laughing subject. Indeed, Miranda's affectionate response, indicated by her move to invite Harry to her side, suggests that Harry's foolish behavior secures emotional attachment in addition to a respect for authority. Harry's use of calculated jokes surfaces again during the meal at Termon. Despite Mr. Martin's efforts to dismiss the hostility between Andrew and Cathal, Andrew deploys the disparaging laughter of colonial superiority to ridicule Cathal's academic endeavors. Harry responds to this confusion of power dynamics and perhaps to Andrew's claims to affective authority by inserting himself into the conversation. The narrator, focalized through Harry's perspective, captures the development of this thought process. Harry states internally, "Jokes, jokes, jokes...that's what we need now," before botching the spelling of Cathal's name aloud and prompting Miranda to laugh (83, 85). In this instance, Harry plays the fool in order to exercise total control over the affective environment. By targeting Cathal's name, Harry holds the Gaelic language and the traditions of native Irish Catholics up for ridicule, positing Cathal as the racialized, comedic object. Further, he demonstrates his control over Miranda's laughter in front of her lover in an effort to trouble Cathal's romantic connection to her. Harry's fool antics even succeed in disempowering Andrew, interrupting his disparaging laughter in order to center himself in the struggle for power and to appropriate the laughter in the room to serve Harry's own needs. Ultimately, Harry's work as the fool allows him to avoid the limitations associated with the restrictive roles of the comedic object and laughing subject. As the fool, Harry embodies elements of both roles at once, overtly placing himself in a position of ridicule in order to covertly appropriate and manipulate the

laughter of others. Ultimately, Harry's foolish behavior allows him to occupy a position of affective power unparalleled by the historic laughing forms in Rhys's narrative and the innovative forms of laughter used by Johnston's Anglo-Irish cast.

Even Harry's imperial position and creative affective strategies, however, fail to dominate the exchange of laughter for the duration of the narrative. Embodying a novel form of laughter in his role as the fool, Harry neglects to consider the new limitations associated with this identity. This oversight allows for Miranda's subversive retaliation against the masculine imperial figure whose laughter consistently targets and silences her. Calculating her later responses to the behavior of the fool, Miranda forces Harry's transition from the fool to the joker. In contrast to the fool's control over the laughter of others, the joker is subjugated to the role of the comedic object who must be repeatedly validated by the laughter of others. This renders the joker's own laughter ineffective and strips his speech of value due to its association with nonsense. Harry's role as the joker surfaces primarily following his subtle violations of Miranda's authority. After Harry's attempt to suppress Miranda's laughter during the discussion of his unusual name, the narrator notes that Miranda "didn't say anything for a moment, but peered at his face....then she laughed" before declaring "I don't believe you. I think you're a joker" (26). Here, Miranda counters Harry's attempts to silence her laughter, first by redeploying her own disparaging laughter and invalidating his repressive demands, and then by rendering his speech ridiculous. In her refusal to "believe [him]," Miranda undermines the validity of Harry's command by conflating it with the text of an ineffective joke. A similar exchange occurs in Miranda's discussion with Cathal regarding Harry's affection. When Cathal questions Miranda's interest in the English soldier, Miranda states bluntly "He's a joker. It's good to meet a joker from time to time. You have no cause to worry" (87). In her use of the term "joker," Miranda



effectively disqualifies Harry's previous attempts to manipulate her laughter and romantic interest, regarding his political actions as little more than humorous nonsense. Additionally, rather than validate his position as the masculine imperial figure, she recontextualizes Harry's role to position him as a source of distraction and cathartic release from the building political tension at Termon. Harry's subjugation as the joker reaches its climax in the narrative's closing scene. When Harry proposes to Miranda, she replies with a laugh before stating "you're always joking...I presume you're joking?" (134). Here, Miranda brings an end to Harry's attempts at affective control. By refusing his proposal, Miranda refuses to be possessed and colonized by the imperial figure that has invaded her home country and Termon. Additionally, she renders Harry's language indistinguishable from his jokes at the peak of his vulnerability in the narrative, using his ultimate expression of power as a tool to position him permanently in the role of the powerless comedic object. Ultimately, Harry experiments to little success with dismissive and repressive laughter and compromises his temporary control in his role as the fool during his transition into the joker figure that threatens to reveal the constructed nature of his control. However, Harry's return to England exonerates him from the penalties of his unstable use of laughter in the colonized state, providing him with the affective distance necessary to repeat his proposal to Miranda multiple times in writing and without fear of ridicule. In each stage of laughter, Harry draws on the gendered and racialized privileges of his imperial background that facilitate a seamless transition between historic and innovative laughing forms, a range of laughter that proves far less expansive for the narrative's remaining male figure.

Although the complicated range of laughter deployed by Mr. Martin, Andrew, and Harry demonstrates the opportunities for strategic affective control provided to Johnston's colonial and imperial male characters, Cathal's limited use of laughter does little to construct a semblance of

authority for himself. Indeed, the absence of laughing forms deployed by the native Irish Catholic demonstrates the impossibility of affective articulation for a colonized subject marginalized by a cultural and generational divide. Despite his political commitment to Irish Catholic traditions, Cathal pointedly rejects any indication of “stepping, so to speak, into [his] father’s shoes,” thereby eliminating the possibility of inheriting affective forms specific to the colonized population (80). Similarly, his attachment to Mr. Martin, the narrative’s colonial patriarch, proves equally unproductive in this regard. Although he asserts that Mr. Martin “taught [him] everything...everything he would have wanted to teach Andrew,” Cathal does not or cannot adhere to the model of dismissive laughter that passes organically to the colonial heir even despite Andrew’s best attempts to differentiate himself from his father (20). Drawn between his loyalty to the colonized body and his colonial mentor, Cathal occupies a marginalized space in the social structure for which no historic affective form exists to counteract his repeated positioning as the racialized comedic object. Additionally, Cathal lacks the imperial authority to create alternative masculine expressions without fear of repudiation.

Cathal’s single use of laughter in the narrative demonstrates his discomfort with the role of the laughing subject. When Cathal reports to Miranda that “[t]wo [IRA members] were shot yesterday. Dead. Just walking down the road,” he closes the statement by “laugh[ing] suddenly” (20). In this scene, the narrator’s use of the word “suddenly” describes the spontaneous rather than calculated nature of the laugh, which results in an expression of ambiguous political effect. Because the events warrant continued discussion immediately afterward, Cathal fails to adequately dismiss the implications of the trauma in his laugh as Mr. Martin might. Similarly, the laugh’s potential value as a disparaging commentary on British military forces proves ineffective in the absence of a relevant character to position as the comedic object. Even

Miranda, whose knowledge of laughter stems from years of observation and experimentation with the expression, must ask for clarification of the laugh's intention: "What's funny?" (20). Cathal's response—"It doesn't leave much room for heroics"—attributes the laugh to his ambivalent position between conflicting realities in the War for Independence. As a native Irish Catholic and an advocate for peaceful home rule, Cathal finds himself drawn between his loyalty to the IRA and his acknowledgement of its contribution to the war's senseless violence. Similarly, his adherence to traditional ideals of heroism complicates his understanding of the incompatibility of these myths with contemporary guerrilla warfare.

Therefore, Cathal's ambiguous and ultimately powerless response to the pervasive, interrupting realities in the War for Independence align his laughter closer to Freud's description of the laughter of excess than the effective, politically motivated laughter that exists for the men in Johnston's novel (20). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette deploys the laughter of excess in response to the overwhelming reality of oppressive patriarchal and imperial control in order to reach a state of agentic androgyny. For Cathal, however, the use of the laughter of excess signals a precarious compromise of masculine authority, the only degree of constructed superiority left available to him. Significantly, the lack of results from this expression compounded with Miranda's explicit observation of its failure appears to signal a critical moment of awareness in Cathal who registers the loss of a future in which he can position himself as an effective masculine laughing subject in any capacity. In his only use of laughter in the narrative, Cathal's sudden laughter errs too close to the form of laughter deployed by women at the height of their subjugation, confirming his exclusion from the masculine forms of laughter deployed by Johnston's colonial men and initiating his avoidance of all laughter as the narrative progresses.

Cathal's new understanding of his affective future is further evidenced by his aversion to laughter for the remainder of the narrative, and, indeed, his aversion to any expressive form at all. Following this early experience with unsuccessful and unrecognizable laughter, Cathal rejects vulnerable emotional expression in his relationship with Miranda and, finally, even speech in the moments preceding his death. Rather, Cathal turns stoic, relying on meaningful nonverbal exchanges with the characters similarly positioned on the margins of colonial affect. The narrator writes of Cathal's private communication with Miranda: "they threw their arms around each other and stood locked to each other, not saying a word, not kissing, not moving, each one staring into the other's reflecting eyes" (70). Significantly, Cathal's adherence to nonverbal communication outside of the exchange of laughing subjects and comedic objects differentiates him from Rhys's racialized heroine. Antoinette desperately experiments with the observable forms of political, masculine laughter in an attempt to articulate her agency and subvert her affective subjugation. By contrast, Cathal's rejection of all forms of expression indicates his understanding of the ultimate futility of pursuing imperial laughter as a colonized subject. By refusing to deploy incriminating feminine laughter, Cathal effectively extracts himself from the hierarchy of expression in which his only available position is that of the racialized and essentially feminine other. Ultimately, Cathal's rejection of laughter, while incapable of altering his fate as an expendable colonized subject, exposes the exclusionary and racialized rules of this expression. Unlike his colonial benefactor, his childhood friend, or his political opponent, Cathal fails to transition seamlessly between masculine forms of laughter, maintaining a degree of privilege over only Miranda, the racialized colonial woman.

Unlike Antoinette whose initial understanding of laughter stems from her observations of a maternal figure, Miranda's early conception of laughter more closely resembles the forms used

by her male counterparts. Indeed, although Miranda's mother shares Annette's desire for "company, a civilized life, intelligent conversation," Miranda's childhood at Termon departs significantly from Antoinette's upbringing (60). Filled with the echo of her father's dismissive laughter, Termon appears removed from feminine affective expression in any capacity, an absence Miranda notes even in the fragmented memories of her mother, who died early in Miranda's childhood (60). Although Miranda initially states that her mother exists as "a series of sharply recollected sounds in my head," she quickly qualifies this statement by describing those sounds as the result of movement and music rather than affective utterances: "the swish of a dress in my nursery bedroom...the tapping of her shoes on the flagstones of the hall; the sound of the piano playing" (4). Even Nanny, Miranda's surrogate mother and Johnston's own Christophine figure, neglects to present feminine laughter or to share any information with Miranda about her mother. Miranda states: "Nanny knows everything, but she doesn't tell" (48). Isolated from any model of feminine laughter and temporarily protected from the gendered and racialized rules of laughter in the surrounding colonial environment, Miranda's childhood at Termon represents a period of agentic and largely masculine expression.

In the opening pages of the narrative, Miranda freely exercises her capacity to interpret the world around her and to command and correct masculine discourse. In an early conversation with Harry, Miranda details her talents for observation and reasoning, which culminate in her ability to "make [her] mind up about things," particularly issues relating to the political state of Ireland (49). During this period of political discussion, Harry also becomes aware of Miranda's physical stature for the first time, describing her hands as "strong, not like the pale fragile hands of the girls he was used to" (51). Here, Miranda's nontraditional assertion of agency and political awareness provokes Harry's re-evaluation of her. By describing Miranda as having masculine

characteristics, Harry positions her as a figure that exists outside of the traditional schema for English womanhood. Miranda further deploys a degree of masculine authority in her command of language. During Cathal's musings about the recent death of several IRA members—"They seem to be getting a lot of information from somewhere. From who?"—Miranda interrupts Cathal's thoughts with the brief grammatical correction: "Whom" (19). In this instance, Miranda verbally inserts herself into the political aside that positions her as reactive listener to news about the war rather than an active participant. Significantly, her achievement in this conversation stems from her superior use of the English language, perhaps in an attempt to evoke her connection to imperial ancestry. Miranda's performance of masculine authority climaxes in a similar interaction with Andrew. When Andrew begins to demean his father's work in front of Harry and Cathal, Miranda exclaims: "Shut up, Andrew. God, I wish you hadn't come back. You must try to understand what's happening here, and if you can't, just keep your mouth shut" (32). In this instance, Miranda challenges her brother's authority as the masculine heir to Termon first by implicating his lack of knowledge about the current political environment in Ireland and then by overtly attempting to silence him. Unaccustomed to rebuke by male figures, who traditionally bear the responsibility of limiting female expression, Miranda temporarily experiences a freedom of agency and a command of language typically reserved for masculine characters.

Miranda's laughter during this period also indicates the temporary absence of gendered affective restraints at Termon. In the opening pages of the narrative, Miranda deploys laughter indiscriminately and without regard for the political implications of the expression. In these scenes, her affective naïveté materializes in carefree laughter, the same form of laughter that renders both Annette and Antoinette vulnerable to ridicule in the rigidly policed affective environment in Rhys's novel. Prior to the arrival of Andrew and Harry, Miranda goes to the

beach alone, observing traces of wildlife: “bird footmarks crossed and re-crossed near the water’s edge. The oyster-catchers had been catching oysters” (15). During this scene, the narrator notes that Miranda unexpectedly interrupts her observations to “laug[h] at her thought” (15). In contrast to the calculated laughter of her male counterparts, Miranda’s laughter in this instance appears in relative isolation, neither as a response to disparaging discourse or an attempt to manipulate or dismiss the laughter of others. Devoid of political intention and associated with only ordinary observations of wildlife, Miranda’s early laughter appears to arise solely for the purpose of celebrating her temporary achievement of “illusory...happiness” (15). This laughter surfaces again in Miranda’s early interaction with Cathal. When Cathal refers to Miranda as a “child with a woman’s hair style,” the narrator notes that Miranda “laughed happily” (23). Despite Cathal’s attempt to exercise patriarchal control by casting Miranda in the position of an infantilized female figure, the narrator’s use of the term “happily” overtly associates Miranda’s response with joy rather than political retaliation. In this exchange, Miranda, still unaware of the full extent of the gender dynamic and the tools for subverting her oppression, adheres to carefree laughter that clings to simple childhood joy but fails to secure agency for her in her new adult relationship. Drawing on her experiences at Termon, Miranda’s early affective performance proves fragmented, drawn between an unorthodox command of masculine discourse and the politically ineffective use of carefree laughter. Significantly, it is this nontraditional and non-binary approach to affective expression that necessitates the rigid policing of feminine affect as the narrative continues.

The arrival of Andrew, Harry, and Cathal at Termon signals the end of an age in which Miranda can exercise affect freely and with little concern for the politics of expression. Although Mr. Martin’s sanctuary functions as an idealistic space cordoned off from political and social

turmoil, Johnston's new generation of male figures usher the violence of the War for Independence inside the walls of the estate, representing the imperial, colonial, and colonized perspectives. Rising tension between these disparate forces produces an unstable exchange of laughing subjects and comedic objects that necessitates the rapid transition between masculine forms of laughter for Andrew and Harry and the growing reservation of Cathal. However, the affective subjugation of Miranda, the colonial woman, surfaces as a unifying thread across the men's political and cultural divisions. Despite his own inability to command masculine discourse or laughter, Cathal acts as the first of Johnston's male figures to actively police Miranda's capacity for expression. After finding Miranda dancing and freely laughing at the shore, Cathal demands to know whether Miranda has "gone mad or something?" (16). Significantly, Cathal's description of Miranda's expression as "mad" serves a dual purpose. By attributing Miranda's carefree laughter to madness, Cathal superficially designates the expression as nonsensical and non-normative, creating a disjunction between laughter and the female subject. However, Cathal's choice of the term "mad" also makes more nuanced reference to Miranda's conflicting performance of masculine and feminine affect. In his knowledge of the gendered dimensions of mad or excessive laughter, Cathal's demand exposes Miranda's expression as androgynous, overtly confronting her transgression of the parameters for feminine laughter and behavior and signaling the onset of gendered affective surveillance.

Andrew and Harry demonstrate similar efforts to limit Miranda's affective authority. Concerned with her increasing ineligibility as a future wife and mother, Andrew catalyzes Miranda's transition to adulthood, a period he considers removed from the instability of free expression and marked by careful performance of affect. During their first interaction on the beach, Andrew issues a warning to Miranda following her attempts to position Harry as an



impotent joker figure: “Manners, sister. Remember, the plaits have gone now. You have to behave” (26). In this instance, Andrew posits Miranda’s “modern” hairstyle as sufficient evidence of her transition into adulthood and justification for her removal from the masculine exchange of laughing subjects and comedic objects. In contrast to Miranda’s previous position of authority, Andrew now commands her to “behave,” instituting a new system of feminine expression that coincides with restrictive colonial gender roles: “manners.” In similar fashion, Harry repeatedly interrupts his interactions with Miranda to criticize and correct her aptitude for masculine expression. During his vulnerable scene at the piano, Harry issues a series of demands to silence Miranda’s mocking laughter. Similarly, he attempts to invalidate her political opinions by referring to her discourse as merely a “[d]-disconcerting” product of an improper upbringing: “At home nice, well brought up girls don’t go around talking about guns and freedom” (55, 53). In both instances, the arrival of politically motivated masculine figures to Termon incites a collective effort to suppress and colonize resistant feminine affect. As a result of these efforts, Cathal, Andrew, and Harry appear to temporarily succeed in fragmenting Miranda’s understanding of the appropriate forms of feminine expression and of herself as an affective subject. Miranda demonstrates this confusion in a later conversation with Harry—“I’m not much good at explaining the way I feel”—and later still in her reflection on the futility of her use of political discourse: “I felt briefly at one time a longing to fight for freedom, but I merely cried for freedom; an inadequate contribution to the struggles of a nation” (52, 3). United by their disavowal of agentic heroines, the novel’s masculine figures work to silence Miranda’s use of political, masculine expression, resigning her instead to historically ineffective feminine expression and silence.

Although Miranda experiences a brief period of affective disorientation following the arrival of the narrative's male characters, she refuses to internalize the gendered and racialized limitations of expression or to perpetuate these rules in her laughter. Rather, like Antoinette and her mother before her, Miranda abandons her carefree treatment of laughter for a careful experimentation with the forms of masculine laughter demonstrated by her father, brother, and the narrative's imperial figure. Drawing on years of observation inside the walls of Termon, Miranda initially deploys the dismissive form of laughter used by Mr. Martin in his attempts to distance himself from the reality of the war. For Miranda, however, dismissive laughter arises primarily as a way to invalidate the laughter and discourse of the male characters who seek to further silence and marginalize her. As early as the opening scene, Miranda appears to demonstrate this form when testing the boundaries of the newly imposed limitations on female expression. After Andrew demands that Miranda behave in accordance with English manners, Miranda responds with a provocative question, asking Harry if he has "ever bathed naked in the rain" (28). In line with the imperial tendency to repress sexual and emotional excess, Harry "laugh[s]" to dismiss the scandalous and vulnerable image of himself produced by Miranda's inquiry. Significantly, it is in response to this skilled portrayal of dismissive laughter that Miranda "laugh[s] cautiously" (28). Here, the word "cautiously" indicates Miranda's careful use of the expression, suggesting a lack of skill or a degree of discomfort with this new form of laughter. Using Harry's skillful dismissal of her provocation as a model of effective masculine response, Miranda's laugh functions as an echo or trial run for dismissive laughter. However, her use of this expression appears again in full form and skill in her later interactions with Cathal. Following the meal at Termon, Cathal questions Miranda's attraction to Harry, suggesting her infidelity in their own relationship—"That Harry...?"—and again at the close of the novel when

Cathal discovers the extent of Harry's privileged upbringing: "Did you know he could read music before he could walk" (87, 124). In contrast to her previous experimentation with dismissive laughter, the narrator notes that Miranda laughs "in spite of herself" as a form of response to these inquiries, indicating a new degree of comfort with the expression that allows it to issue naturally from the heroine (124). Here, Miranda's laughter serves a dual purpose, simultaneously dismissing her association with Harry, whom she has previously positioned as the joker or comedic object, and invalidating Cathal's efforts to police her intimate relationships. Rejecting the affective suppression demanded by Johnston's male characters, Miranda deploys dismissive, masculine laughter with increasing dexterity as the novel progresses.

Although Miranda initially responds to the repressive efforts of the male characters by echoing her father's dismissive laughter, Miranda transitions into a far more politically effective form of laughter as the gender and racial tension reaches its peak at Termon. Although dismissive laughter serves as an available response to patriarchal control, Miranda's use of disparaging laughter signals a transition from reactive to active expression. Like Andrew, Miranda uses disparaging laughter to navigate an increasingly politicized domestic sphere in which her father's passive laughter loses all efficacy. For Miranda, this form of laughter surfaces primarily at the expense of Harry, the narrative's imperial figure and the character invested in colonizing the exoticized Irish heroine. Prior to the tense scene at the piano, Miranda explains to Harry that her mother's early death has left her void of traditional English social graces. Harry, however, interrupts the exchange in order to detail his romanticized fascination with Miranda, describing her as "the most marvelous girl I've ever met" (49). In response, the narrator notes that Miranda immediately "threw her head back and roared with unromantic laughter" (50). In this exchange, Miranda's laughter functions in direct contrast to Harry's positioning of her as a

colonized object to be marveled at and romanticized by imperial subjects. In an effort to reverse the gender and racial power dynamic, Miranda attempts to render both Harry and his descriptions comedic by deploying laughter and behavior that invalidates his claims. By “thr[owing] her head back” and “roar[ing],” Miranda uses violent, animalistic actions to create a visual disjunction between Harry’s description of her and her present behavior. Similarly, the narrator’s use of the word “unromantic” to describe her laughter signals its subversive nature when contrasted with Harry’s image of an idyllic and “marvelous girl.” Significantly, it is in response to this disparaging, performative laughter that Harry demands Miranda’s silence—“D-don’t laugh”—restricting her from deploying effective, political laughter in defense of herself (50).

Despite Harry’s repeated efforts to suppress her agentic expressions, Miranda’s disparaging laughter reaches its climax in her rejection of Harry as a lover and an imperial master. Prior to his departure from Termon, Harry exercises the full extent of his control over Miranda, suggesting that she leave the sanctuary at Termon in order to become his wife: “Why don’t we run away and get married?” (134). However, in response to this proposition, Miranda only “laugh[s]” before positioning Harry as the joker figure, an object of ridicule: “I presume you’re joking?” (134). In this scene, Miranda deploys disparaging laughter in order to bring an end to Harry’s imperial reign at Termon, but also to participate in the conversation about her future prospects in the single form of expression proven politically effective. Miranda laughs disparagingly to save herself from a future of affective silence and a marriage in which she will not be permitted to “go around talking about guns and freedom” (53). The narrator reveals the success of Miranda’s disparaging laughter in the final moments before Harry’s departure. Although Harry attempts to have the last word in their exchange, he fails even to utter her full name—“M-M-M—” before Miranda “pushe[s] him out into the dark,” calling him a “dear silly

thing” (135). Here, Miranda refuses even to allow Harry to speak her name, rendering him the silent and “silly” comedic figure into which he has endeavored to transform her since his arrival at Termon. Ultimately, it is Miranda’s use of disparaging laughter that allows her to temporarily reverse the gender and racial dynamic in order to preserve her agency and the future she desires.

Johnston’s novel, however, is not a redemptive narrative that shatters the limitations on female expression introduced in Rhys’s novel. Indeed, any agency Miranda achieves by thwarting the repressive efforts of the imperial figure dissipates at the novel’s climax only pages later. After Cathal warns Harry and Andrew of the IRA’s plan to assassinate them, Cathal, Miranda, and Mr. Martin await the arrival of the IRA members who will undoubtedly execute Cathal for his transgression. Although Mr. Martin attempts to reason with the IRA members in order to save Cathal’s life, he quickly discovers that both dismissive laughter and traditional discourse “have no meaning in this sort of situation” (145). Cathal, knowledgeable of the absence of effective forms of masculine expression available to him as the racialized other, also remains silent. Similarly, Miranda’s authoritative disparaging laughter proves entirely absent from this scene, replaced by unintelligible pleading: “No. No. No. Cathal. Oh God, God, God, God. Oh please God. No” (146). Indeed, the only laughter that surfaces in the final scene erupts from an armed IRA member, as the narrator notes: “The man in the coat laughed” (145). Although the greater narrative investigates the experimentation of marginalized bodies with political laughter, Johnston’s final scene contextualizes the laughter at Termon in the larger narrative of the Irish War for Independence. Mr. Martin’s use of dismissive laughter to avoid the realities of building political turmoil prove ineffective when IRA members cross the threshold of his sanctuary, bringing senseless violence with them. Perhaps more significantly, however, Johnston frames Miranda’s dynamic experimentation with laughter inside the parameters of

Termon, highlighting the absence of agentic female expression when the security of the Big House is compromised by outside forces. In the closing scene, only the armed IRA member charged with the same duty as the imperial figure—eliminating resistance from the native Irish Catholics—proves capable of exercising a powerful, disparaging laugh that renders Cathal, the Martins, and their sanctuary objects of ridicule. Ultimately, Miranda’s affective journey ends where it began, a brief experience with authoritative masculine expression followed by rebuke and policed silence. Like Rhys, Johnston captures the cycle of subversion and containment that dictates the affective experience of the colonial woman, although this time confined to a single generation. Ultimately for Miranda, as for Annette and Antoinette, the freedom to deploy laughter for political effect proves a romantic yet unobtainable fantasy that threatens to increase rather than protect from the tremendous psychological and emotional trauma of colonialism on the racialized female body. Significantly, it is this revelation that provokes Miranda’s final act, reminiscent of the sacrifice made by her Jamaican predecessor.

Although Johnston’s narrative excludes decades of Miranda’s life following Cathal’s death, the effects of the event and of the role of laughter prove central to Miranda’s thoughts and expressions at the close of her life. Miranda’s investigations of laughter transition from analyses specific to masculine characters to holistic questions about the nature of laughter in Ireland: “We laugh in this country for such strange reasons” and “Why do we laugh when we should cry? Here. Is it only here in this sad island?” (6, 137). However, Miranda’s final environment fails to provide satisfying answers to these inquiries or to foster further investigation of feminine laughter. Much like Antoinette, Miranda’s subversive experimentation with the available forms of masculine laughter concludes in a setting of imprisonment and hyper-surveillance that eliminates the possibility of deploying any form of political expression. Indeed, Miranda

repeatedly references a need to suppress her laughter for fear of her caretakers' retaliation. An elderly Miranda writes of affective restrictions: "I mustn't laugh. My pain comes when I laugh. They become disturbed" (109). In this instance, Miranda identifies laughter as an expression uniquely associated with trauma, both past and present. Significantly, however, laughter, in this description, no longer carries the possibility of masculine authority. Rather, Miranda regards it as an expression wholly barred to her, an understanding reinforced by a lifetime of witnessing female laughter met by masculine rebuke. Miranda's description of the current affective climate at Termon also reveals a lack of progressive movement for feminine expression during the excluded decades. Just as a young Harry refers to Miranda's political laughter as "[d]-disconcerting," Miranda notes that her caretakers regard female political expression as "disturb[ing]" (55). Miranda further details her caretakers' response to feminine laughter in an additional passage:

I am laughing.

Can't you hear me laughing?

Their hands adjust the covers, smooth my hair.

They cannot hear me laughing.

They would be upset if they could hear me.

They would be sure to consider it a manifestation of physical pain and they would in their kindness inject me with drugs...My head, even, is lost to me when they do that in their kindness. (3)

Here, Miranda proves unable even to effectively vocalize laughter in her final state. Although she positions herself as the only remaining laughing subject at Termon, Miranda notes that her caretakers refuse to acknowledge feminine laughter as a legitimate form of expression. Indeed,

Miranda suggests that any use of audible laughter results in a series of civilizing and composing gestures by her caretakers who address the disruption by reinstating order: “adjust[ing] the covers,” “smooth[ing] my hair,” and “inject[ing] me with drugs.” However, it is Miranda’s understanding of the caretakers’ perception of female laughter that illustrates the full effects of gendered affective suppression. By stating that her caretakers “would be sure to consider [her laughter] a manifestation of physical pain,” Miranda describes feminine laughter as reduced to an automatic physical response divorced from her capacity for reasoning and political expression. Similarly, she notes that her laughter fails to supplement her agency and improve her position, but rather earns her medication that continues to strip away her consciousness until “[m]y head, even, is lost to me.” In her final state, Miranda’s laughter completes the degenerative cycle for feminine affect, becoming criminalized, penalized, and ultimately silenced altogether.

Although Miranda’s final act does not possess the sudden violent nature of Antoinette’s arson and suicide, her intention remains the same: bringing an end to the political expression that repeatedly marginalizes and eludes her. Without the aid of a narrative device like Coco, the green parrot, that allows Antoinette to reproduce a period of sudden affective silence, Miranda chooses to silence laughter by rejecting any future that perpetuates the narrative of feminine affective suppression. Despite a series of opportunities to acquire privilege and power as an imperial subject through a marriage with Harry, Miranda refuses to submit to a union that necessitates the physical colonization of her body in addition to the psychological and emotional trauma left by her upbringing in a divided nation. As she notes in her old age, she “approach[es] death; *virgo intacta* in so many ways” (40). Additionally, Miranda refuses to provide her body as a site of production for future generations of Anglo-Irish women subject to a lifetime of oppression without a legitimate expressive form with which to communicate their injuries and



negotiate their political positions. By producing “no one...who will dream of me,” Miranda removes herself from the trajectory of motherhood that forces Annette to pass down her silent and powerless position in the colonial domestic sphere to her daughter (68). Indeed, Miranda appears even to prevent herself from fully transitioning into womanhood—“I never reached maturity”—perhaps in an attempt to cling to the memory of her temporary masculine authority and carefree laughter prior to the arrival of Harry, Andrew, and Cathal (40). Having secured her position as the last female descendant of her lineage, Miranda takes the final steps to remove herself from the exchange of laughing subjects and comedic objects and, indeed, from affect altogether. She notes that she has “destroyed...the power to feel passion, pity, rage” in a “willful destruction of myself,” effectively transforming herself into another of Termon’s ghosts, who, she notes, “have always been so solitary, no carousals or laughter” (152, 2). Significantly, the destruction of Miranda parallels the deterioration of Termon. Isolating herself inside the walls of the domestic space that serves as a site of sanctuary, subversion, and senseless violence, Miranda allows Termon to “fall down” around her, consuming the history of laughter that transpired there (2). As the last remaining witness to events of the narrative, Miranda notes that she has “played my play for the last time,” obscuring the political laughter of the masculine figures and her own failed attempts at securing affective agency forever (152). In an effort to bring an end to the legacy of traumatic female affective suppression, Miranda’s rejection of motherhood and the script of masculine politics for her transition into a spectral figure allows her to author a new, productive mythology for Irish women. In her death, Miranda embodies the affective suffering of a nation of colonial women and enacts a symbolic sacrifice from which new life and alternative identities can arise. In her final act, Miranda mitigates the expansion of affective trauma and oversees the destruction of the Big House and the social system it represents.

Although Miranda's death gestures towards a new age of narrative possibilities for colonial women, it marks the beginning of a critical discussion regarding gendered and racialized affect in Ireland during and prior to the War for Independence. Although the traditions of laughter in Johnson's novel do not adhere to a rigid system of modeling in Rhys's novel, the forms of laughter available to her younger generation of characters remain inextricably bound to divisions of race and gender. While Johnston's colonial patriarch, Mr. Martin, refuses to acknowledge changes in the political state, deploying only dismissive and uncomprehending laughter, the male figures of a newer generation shift seamlessly between the available forms of political masculine laughter. Andrew, while briefly adhering to his father's dismissive expression, transitions into a period of suppressing laughter before quickly adapting imperial disparaging laughter and even a vulnerable laughter of pleasure. Harry, the narrative's imperial male figure, displays an even greater range of laughing forms, shifting from dismissive laughter to repressing the laughter of others to a still more novel range of affective forms in the joker and the fool. By contrast, the narrative's native Irish Catholic, Cathal, remains barred from the forms of laughter available to imperial and colonial men, ultimately capable of accessing only androgynous laughter that threatens his single privileged attribute, his masculine gender. It is Miranda, however, who experiences the full effect of the restrictive rules of affect. Racialized by her connection to Ireland and confined to the domestic sphere as a colonial woman, Miranda's narrative captures the cycle of subversion and punishment that polices women who attempt to exceed their positions in the affective hierarchy. Like Antoinette before her and Cathal, Miranda is fated to die a sacrificial but silent death that simultaneously subverts and reinforces post-Victorian affective codes.

In her final years, Miranda strives to contain her oppression as the target of laughter and masculine rebuke by motivating her own affective deterioration and neglecting to participate in the preservation of Termon. In doing so, Miranda intervenes in the succession of female affective oppression passed down to her from earlier generations. However, much like Antoinette's, Miranda's private death makes for an unsettling and isolated resolution to a system of inequity with international scope. When a new generation of imperial and colonial figures navigates the complexities of this expression much to the same effect as their predecessors, the gendered and racialized rules of laughter become legitimized and naturalized, exhausting the expression as a tool for subversion by female and colonized bodies. Indeed, in Johnston's narrative, Miranda must adhere to a tradition of female sacrifice in order to effect even symbolic change, leaving the quandary of female affective suppression painstakingly documented yet unresolved. However, the significance of Johnston's narrative is not nullified in its inability to posit a comprehensive solution to alleviate the affective silence of women across space and time. Rather, it is a key narrative in the ongoing conversation concerning gendered and racialized affect in colonial environments. Johnston revisits and revises the deeply problematic narrative of Miranda in Shakespeare's initial work, recasting his naïve and idyllic woman as a heroine impacted by tremendous social and political pressures and invested in decisions about the future of her body and voice. By investigating the complexities of this expression across generations and cultures at a time of intense racial and political turmoil, Johnston urges readers to revisit the picturesque Big House in Irish novels and the paradise in Shakespeare's play with a critical ear for echoes of imperial and subversive laughter. As the colonial woman inevitably discovers, a sanctuary for laughers, jokers, and fools is no sanctuary at all.

## Works Cited

- Benstock, Shari. "The Masculine World of Jennifer Johnston." *Twentieth-Century Women Novelists*. Ed. Thomas Staley. Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1982. 191-217. Print.
- Berge, Marit. "The Big House in Jennifer Johnston's Novels." *Excursions in Fiction: Essays in Honour of Professor Lars Hartveit on His 70th Birthday*. Ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews. Oslo: Novus, 1994. 11-31. Print.
- Cairns, David, and Shaun Richards. "Tropes and Traps: Aspects of 'Woman' and Nationality in Twentieth-century Irish Drama." *Gender in Irish Writing*. Philadelphia: Open UP, 1991. 128-37. Print.
- Ingman, Heather. "Nation and Gender in Jennifer Johnston: A Kristevan Reading." *Irish University Review* 35.2 (2005): 334-48. Print.
- Innes, C. L. "Postcolonial Studies and Ireland." *Comparing Postcolonial Literature: Dislocations*. Ed. Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray. NY: St. Martin's 2000. 21-30.
- Johnston, Jennifer. *Fool's Sanctuary*. London: Headline Book, 1987. Print.
- Kahn, Laila. "Domestic Unrest and Jennifer Johnston's Fiction of the Irish Troubles." *Inquire: Journal of Comparative Literature* 2.2 (2012): n. pag. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.
- Kearney, Richard. "Myth and Motherland." *Ireland's Field Day*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 1986. 61-82. Print.
- Kennedy-Andrews, Elmer. "Feminising Liberal Humanism: Jennifer Johnston's *Shadows on Our Skin*, *The Railway Station Man*, *The Illusionist*, *How Many Miles to Babylon?* and *The Old Jest*." *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the North*. Dublin: Four Court, 2003. 224-26. Print.

- Lanters, José. "Jennifer Johnston's Divided Ireland." *The Clash of Ireland: Literary Contrasts and Connections*. Ed. C.C Barfoot and Theo D'haen. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989. 209-22. Print.
- Lubbers, Klaus. "'This White Elephant of a Place': Jennifer Johnston's Uses of the Big House." *Ancestral Voices: The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Ed. Otto Rauchbauer. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1992. 221-37. Print.
- Lynch, Rachael Sealy. "Public Spaces, Private Lives: Irish Identity and Female Selfhood in the Novels of Jennifer Johnston." *Border Crossing: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama, 2000. 250-67. Print.
- Rosslyn, Felicity. "The Importance of Being Irish: Jennifer Johnston." *The Cambridge Quarterly* 32.3 (2003): 239-49. Print.
- Rosslyn, Felicity. "'The Nonsense about Our Irishness': Jennifer Johnston." *Essays and Studies* 57 (2004): 104-22. Print.
- St. Peter, Christine. "Jennifer Johnston's Irish Troubles: A Materialist-feminist Reading." *Gender in Irish Writing*. Philadelphia: Open UP, 1991. 112-27. Print.
- Virdee, Satnam. "Class, Nation and the Racialized Other." *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 9-26. Print.

“Laughter, and in the laughter the door opened”: A Conclusion

At the close of these novels, Antoinette looks out from the mansion at Thornfield and Miranda from the Big House at Termon onto worlds of strikingly similar sights and sounds. Rochester and Harry, the imperial masculine figures, return to English civilization unscathed by the trauma their arrival brings to other nations and unchanged in their adherence to imperial systems of race and gender. During their time abroad, both men demonstrate an unparalleled ability to adopt and discard the forms of political masculine laughter best suited to secure their authority and legitimize the constructed nature of imperial rule. Although Harry assumes additional roles as the joker and the fool that abandon the rigid system of modeling that Rochester follows, his ability to create novel affective identities serves as further testament to his tremendous expressive authority. To a lesser extent, Andrew, the young colonial male, demonstrates his own capacity for masculine expression. Aspiring to the mastery demonstrated by his predecessors, Andrew mirrors their shift from a repressive state to dismissive, disparaging, and genuine laughter. It is worth noting, however, that his ability to master affective forms surfaces only as a result of a lifetime spent abroad in England and a carefully constructed identity that rejects all association with his Anglo-Irish lineage and with Cathal, his Irish Catholic friend.

By contrast, Mr. Mason and Mr. Martin, whose affinities for Jamaica and Ireland, respectively, produce a physical and social distance from England, remain confined to a single reactive form of dismissive laughter that accomplishes little outside of maintaining the appearance of peaceful colonial rule. And finally, Cathal, the racialized Irish Catholic IRA member, mirrors only Daniel Cosway, the Jamaican ex-slave and the illegitimate son of a settler. Removed from the authority provided to other masculine figures by ties to imperial blood, Cathal and Daniel experience a traumatic period of misrecognition from their friends and family

followed by a period of affective silence, their laughter insufficient currency in the presence of imperial men.

Rhys's and Johnston's male characters demonstrate numerous important similarities. However, it is Antoinette and Miranda whose complex and emotionally charged narratives prove devastatingly identical, their inevitable fates stemming from a single source: the constancy of female affective suppression across space and time. Limited by the absence of models of effective feminine laughter, Antoinette and Miranda desperately attempt to deploy dismissive and disparaging masculine laughter to reverse the gender dynamic that renders them immutably silent and submissive. However, in doing so, both heroines slate themselves for violent retaliation from men, Antoinette from Rochester and Miranda from her brother, lover, and admirer. Although Miranda does not deploy Antoinette's climactic "mad" laughter in a community forum that welcomes speculation about her mental state, her childlike carefree laughter functions to the same effect as Antoinette's final laugh. Antoinette's "crazy" laugh echoes an ill-fated flight toward androgynous expression outside of the restrictive gender binary in the same way that Miranda's early laughter reflects an upbringing outside of traditional gender roles. Most significantly, however, Antoinette and Miranda die the same symbolic death in order to bring about the end of laughter, one in the abandonment of any possibility of female political expression and the other in a gesture of hope for new generations of women.

In Rhys's and Johnston's novels, the gendered and racialized rules of laughter and the narratives of laughing women fail to differ in any significant regard, suggesting the existence of a comprehensive framework for laughter that transcends space and time. Therefore, Miranda's positioning after the turn of the century cannot save her from the paradox of Victorian gender roles just as Antoinette's geographic distance from England fails to mitigate the effect of

imperial rule in her homeland and intimate life. Laughter appears to surface in colonial environments as a result of the inability of traditional masculine discourse to effectively articulate meaning across genders and cultures. However, the failure of laughter to engender new opportunities for expression, and indeed, to make permanent women's affective silence in death, raises questions about the authors' decisions to use laughter to revitalize the narratives of iconically oppressed heroines.

Here, a distinction must be made between laughter as a solution for historic inequities and laughter as a narrative tool for exposing a root cause of these inequities. Rhys's and Johnston's exploration of laughter introduces a valuable expressive form that differs from traditional discourse in its radical nature and in its ability to straddle the divide between political and emotional expression. By complicating the one-dimensional narratives of Bertha Rochester and Shakespeare's heroine with a powerful, multidimensional expression, Rhys and Johnston simultaneously inspire the possibility for subversion and illustrate the insubstantial results of changes in rhetoric when unsupported by reform in cultural ideology. Antoinette and Miranda die unsettling symbolic deaths in line with the problematic trope of sacrificial women. However, to do otherwise would constitute a revision that censors the legitimate effects of the mental and emotional strain on women that Margaret Strobel and others bring to light in their works. Rhys and Johnston avoid the pitfalls of obscuring Brontë's and Shakespeare's narratives to the level of fairytale, refusing to adopt unrealistic endings that indicate the arrival of a resolution to the quandary of female affective suppression. Rather, they re-envision deeply problematic narratives as cautionary tales that gesture toward the possibility of alternative futures for women when changes in expressive form intersect with structural change.



Rhys's and Johnston's novels trouble the romanticized narrative of the silent woman in order to call for new generations of readers to consider alternative legacies for women. Reading laughter into their work acknowledges their efforts to vocalize a history of systemic gendered and racialized affective oppression by constructing a multidimensional expressive form that simultaneously perpetuates and exposes the social rules that create it. Similarly, reading laughter validates the affective resistance of colonial women and colonized subjects traditionally silenced by masculine discourse. For Antoinette and Miranda, the rules and results of laughter remain the same because affective oppression proves part and parcel of the work of empire and because the erasure of women's narratives is not easily forgotten or overcome in the span of a single century. However, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Fool's Sanctuary*, Rhys and Johnston write and publish their heroines into a future of new affective relations. In using laughter as a tool to promote change and in discarding it when it becomes destructive, Rhys and Johnston at last master the affective exchange that eludes Antoinette and Miranda and generations of colonial women before them. In doing so, Rhys and Johnston collectively author a final laugh, writing affective silence out of history and the possibility for agentic narratives for women out of the realm of fiction.