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Reconstructing Female Identity in Wide *Sargasso Sea* and Lucy from Foucault's Counter-Memory Theory

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Abstract

The thesis applies Foucault's counter-memory theory to interpret the reconstruction of female identity in Caribbean Neo-Victorian writing. Focusing on contemporary Caribbean women writers Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, the study analyses in depth the colonial symbols that regulate female identity in the parent texts, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, as well as the strategies used by the subtexts to reconstruct counter-memory narratives through symbolic cleavage. It reveals how Caribbean women's identities are fragmented into "the Other" under colonial power, and how the resetting of symbols counteracts linear historical narratives, transforming memory into resistance. The "fragmentation" of Caribbean women's identities is not static, but rather a dynamic reconstruction of subjectivity through symbolic cleavage in counter-memory writing text.

Keywords: counter-memory writing; Caribbean Neo-Victorian writing; reconstruction of female identity; symbol.

1. Introduction

Foucault's assertion that literature since the nineteenth century operates as "counter-memory" by manifesting histories of otherness through "violence, transgression, madness, sexuality, death, and finitude" (Foucault 8) provides a critical framework for analyzing Caribbean Neo-Victorian writingsencoded with colonial textual symbols. This postcolonial literary mode, emerging from the late twentieth-century reassessment of Victorian cultural hegemony, strategically interrogates the symbolic systems through which canonical British novels codified imperial hierarchies. By performing radical rereadings of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) which texts are naturalized colonial ideologies through gendered metaphors, Caribbean writers Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) enact what Foucault (8) terms "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges". Their novels fracture the parent texts' symbolic architectures to expose how Victorian domestic fiction transformed Caribbean women into pathological " the Other", then reconstitute these fragments into new narratives of selfhood through resistance.

Rhys's textual intervention exposes Brontë's portrayal of Bertha's insanity in *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette's dehumanization as "white cockroaches" (*WSS*, 20) in *Wide Sargasso Sea* stemming from the same colonial pathology. The animal-liketattoos applied to both characters reveal a continuum of imperial fear. Brontë's "madwoman" embodies Victorian anxieties about racial contamination, Rhys's "white cockroach" manifests the colonized subject's internalized trauma. The parallel degradation of both women through bestial imagery demonstrates how colonial discourse pathologizes reconstructions of selves, whether through Gothic madness or racial slurs. By having Antoinette recall the childhood taunt alongside the ominous warning "Let sleeping dogs lie" (*WSS*, 20), Rhys reconstructs colonial memory, showing how imperial violence produces insanity through systematic dehumanization. This symbolic recalibration transforms Brontë's monstrous "the Other" into a diagnostic mirror reflecting the empire's psychological ravages.

Similarly, Lucy Snowe's chromatic erasure in *Villette* with her surname "Snow" signaling self-negation embodies the disciplinary mechanisms enforcing Victorian femininity. These symbolic systems function as textual carceral, their metaphorical chains binding both fictional characters and real colonial subjects through literary canonization. Caribbean counter-memory writing targets precisely these semiotic prisons, recognizing that decolonizing female identity requires dismantling the signs that constructed colonial subjectivity.

Through strategic symbolic cleavage, Rhys and Kincaid transform the wreckage of colonial semiotics into tools for postcolonial becoming. Kincaid's protagonist Lucy performs onomastic rebellion against *Villette*'s erasure, "I called myself Emily, Charlotte, Jane... until I could no longer breathe inside their letters" (*Lucy*, 149). This nominal subversion fractures patronymic chains binding Caribbean women to colonial literary foremothers, transforming nominative acts from impositions to self-inscriptions. Madness becomes clairvoyance, silence archival testimony, and textual hauntings revolutionary communion. In these Neo-Victorian narratives, memory ceases being imperial property, reconfigured instead as insurgent methodology, a process of reassembling postcolonial subjectivity through the very symbols that once negated them.

2. Methodology: From Memory to Counter-Memory

i) From Plato's Memory Image to Halbwachs's Collective Memory

Plato's theory of anamnesis, positing memory as the soul's recovery of innate knowledge, and Aristotle's empirical model of memory as sensory reconstruction established a dialectic between transcendental and experiential paradigms (Sorabji 5-6). Though divergent in their conceptualization of memory's origins, both Greek philosophers recognized mental imagery as memory's essential medium, anticipating modern inquiries into how cognitive processes interact with cultural frameworks. This ancient dichotomy between recollective introspection and environmental conditioning laid crucial groundwork for twentieth-century sociological approaches, particularly Maurice Halbwachs's revolutionary conception of collective memory as socially constructed consciousness.

Halbwachs's collective memory theory fundamentally reoriented scholarly understanding by demonstrating how individual recollection operates within social matrices. His analysis begins with the observation that even seemingly private mental acts like dreaming utilize culturally shared symbols and narratives (Halbwachs 42). This insight develops into a comprehensive framework where personal memories emerge through continual negotiation with group remembrances. The process of "localization of memories" (52) reveals how individuals situate autobiographical experiences within communal timelines and spatial contexts. When reconstructing past events, people unconsciously align their narratives with dominant social ideologies and their immediate community's historical consciousness (53). Through this mnemonic symbiosis, collective memory constructs identity not through passive absorption but through active participation. Family traditions, communal rituals, and

institutional histories form interlocking reference systems that enable individuals to interpret personal experiences and position themselves within social hierarchies. Halbwachs thus transformed memory from a psychological faculty into a sociological phenomenon, showing how the collective past continually reshapes present selfhood through dynamic cultural transmission.

ii). Assmann's Conception of Communicative Memory and Cultural Memory

Building upon Halbwachs's collective memory framework, Jan and Aleida Assmann differentiated between communicative and cultural memory to address memory's transmission mechanisms. Communicative memory operates through lived interactions within living generations, sustained by emotional resonance rather than factual accuracy (Jan Assmann 3). Family oral histories exemplify that anecdotes gain coherence through affective emphasis, while irrelevant details fade through collective neglect. This model explains how communities curate identity-forming memories informally, relying on shared emotional frameworks rather than formal institutions.

Cultural memory transcends generational limits through codified symbols and material artifacts. Jan Assmann identifies four preservation stages including objectification encoding meaning into symbols, storage as physical conservation, reactivation that contains ritual engagement, and circulation in social dissemination (Jan Assmann 38-39). Pre-literate societies used embodied rituals such as dances encoding ancestral wisdom or rites renewing communal bonds. Writing revolutionized this process by externalizing memory resulting in texts becoming reinterpretable "frozen speech", allowing continuity amid cultural evolution. Religious scriptures exemplify this paradox, accruing layered interpretations while retaining canonical authority which a dynamic Halbwachs's theory could not reconcile.

The Assmanns challenged Halbwachs's rigid separation of memory and tradition. Cultural memory synthesizes both: liturgical recitations, for instance, are formal traditions that become acts of collective remembrance shaped by contemporary contexts (Jan Assmann 25). Aleida Assmann's distinction between functional memory working as active narratives and stored memory as dormant archives further clarifies this interplay (Aleida Assmann 163). Stored symbols, like classical texts during the Middle Ages, await reactivation during crises or ideological shifts. This fluid boundary reveals memory as a palimpsest, continuously rewritten through power dynamics and symbolic reuse.

The Assmanns thus reconceive memory as both social practice and symbolic ecosystem. Where Halbwachs emphasized group negotiation, they exposed how institutions and power structures govern symbolic preservation. National monument-building illustrates this duality where communicative memory selects emotionally resonant events, while cultural memory dictates their expression through sanctioned iconography. Memory survives not through repetition but through the adaptive reworking of symbols across time, a process where forgetting proves as vital as remembering in shaping cultural coherence.

iii) Michel Foucault's Counter-Memory: Bridging Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and Fragility of Identity

Ricoeur identifies the fragility of identity as rooted in its inherently presumptive and contested character, which emerges from the interplay between memory, time, and intersubjective relations. He argues that identity's vulnerability arises first from its unstable temporal constitution, as the question of remaining the same over time introduces an equivocation between sameness as permanence and selfhood as dynamic constancy. This tension, embedded in the "practical and pathetic aspects" of selfhood, renders identity susceptible to rigidification when reduced to a fixed character rather than embracing the flexibility inherent to self-constancy, as exemplified in acts like promising (Ricoeur 81). The second source of fragility lies in the confrontation with reconstructions, where the presence of othersperceived as threats to one's self-esteem or communal coherence, transforms difference into exclusion or humiliation, destabilizing collective and personal identities (81). Third, the "heritage of founding violence" exacerbates this instability, as historical communities often legitimize their origins

through acts of coercion or symbolic domination, embedding "real and symbolic wounds" into collective memory. These wounds, celebrated by some and condemned by others, perpetuate cycles of contested remembrance and forgetting, further complicating identity's coherence (82).

The manipulation of memory, for Ricoeur, becomes a tool to mask these vulnerabilities through ideological processes that intertwine identity demands with power structures. Ideology operates by distorting reality, legitimizing authority, and integrating symbolic systems into the collective consciousness, thereby mediating the "breach between the request for legitimacy and belief" in systems of domination (83). While ideology initially functions as a "silent constraint" within traditional societies, its deeper complicity with power transforms it into a mechanism for strategic memory manipulation. This instrumentalization exploits identity's fragility, substituting authentic engagement with temporality and alterity for rigid narratives that enforce conformity. Such abuses of memory, Ricoeur suggests, reveal the precariousness of identity when severed from critical reflection, as ideological distortions entrench divisions between "glory for some" and "humiliation for others" (82). These reflections on memory's entanglement with power and identity provide a foundation for examining alternative frameworks, such as Foucault's notion of counter-memory.

Foucault's concept of counter-memory dismantles the Platonic ideal of memory-as-truth, replacing it with three subversive maneuvers, mocking history's claims to objectivity, breaking apart narratives built on fixed identities, and resisting established systems of knowledge (Foucault 160). Counter-memory reimagines history as discontinuous and plural, privileging marginalized ruptures over linear progress. Foucault's critique of Nietzsche's monumental history, a mode that enshrines metaphysical truths through selective memorialization, aligns with his broader project of unmasking archives as disciplinary tools. Public archives, he argues, codify power relations by legitimizing certain narratives through the "author function" while silencing others (114). This positions memory as a battleground where dominant groups institutionalize their values through symbolic preservation, as seen in colonial archives that erased Indigenous knowledge systems.

Foucault reimagines identity through genealogy, a practice of "systematic dissociation" (161) that unravels the myth of unified subjectivity by tracing the heterogeneous symbolic systems that compose it. Contrasting with "antiquarian history"which weaponizes symbols of continuity to anchor identity in a mythic "homeland" (162), exposes how these symbols are not neutral markers but sites of discursive struggle. The "weak identity" the above just projected, Foucault argues, is a fragile collage of borrowed symbols, colonial emblems, racial taxonomies, and gendered scripts that are stitched together to mask the "countless spirits" (161) that contest its possession. Symbols like "whiteness" or "citizenship", far from natural signifiers, are tools of power that impose coherence on inherently fragmented selves, reducing the plural into the plausible.

Foucault's genealogy dissects identity into "mortal phases" (161), discrete symbolic configurations that resist eternalization, revealing how symbols accrue meaning through contingent historical acts. Antiquarian history treats such symbols as sacred heirlooms, preserving their "original" significance to justify present hierarchies. Counter-memory, is a practice that weaponizes subversive symbols to disrupt the dominant archive's symbolic monopoly. Foucault rejects the idea of symbols as transparent vessels of meaning, instead framing them as battlegrounds where power and resistance clash. Mainstream symbols like Rochester's "happiness" in *Wide Sargasso Sea* serve as linguistic fetters, codifying colonial-patriarchal norms to reduce others to docile objects. Counter-memory, however, cultivates symbols that resist this closure. These are not symbols of unity but of dissipation (162), refusing to cohere into the "immortal soul" of metaphysical identity. For Foucault, the radical potential of symbols lies in their capacity to rupture continuity, exposing the arbitrary violence of dominant sign systems while opening space for what he calls "minor discourses", the whispers, contradictions, and gaps that no symbolic order can fully contain. By decentering stable signification, identity is reimagined

not as a fixed entity but as an ongoing symbolic performance, a dissident interplay of meanings that thrives in the fissures where power's attempt to naturalize itself breaks down.

Counter-memory emerges not as mere resistance but as a palimpsest practice: colonial symbols like the "white cockroach" slur are inverted to critique imperial dehumanization, while archival gaps become sites of reparative reimagining. Ricoeur's "work of mourning" (Ricoeur 97), the ethical reckoning with historical erasureintersects with Derrida's spectral logic, demanding that we confront the violence of memory's preservation and the necessity of its reinterpretation. Together, these theorists reveal memory as neither stable nor neutral but as a dynamic interplay of power, narrative, and absence, a process where symbols are continually dismantled and reauthored in the struggle for historical truth.

This theoretical arc culminates in postcolonial literature's subversive practices, as seen in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*. By reworking Victorian texts, these authors expose the silences of colonial archives, transforming trauma into insurgent knowledge.

3. Deconstruction of Colonial Female Subjectivity in the Caribbean

i) Construction of Re-imagined "Antoinette" in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: From Cliff Discourse to the Paradox of Happiness

The novel is set in the post-Emancipation Act in 1833 in the British West Indies, including Jamaica. The second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed a strong and persistent revolt of the black community against the whites.

Rhys's portrayal of Antoinette's fractured identity emerges from the collision between colonial memory's symbolic order and the counter-mnemonic fissures of her Creole existence. As a white Creole in post-Emancipation Jamaica, Antoinette inhabits a liminal and nearly isolated space where the decaying plantation economy renders her family "white niggers" (*WSS*, 20), a slur crystallizing their racial ambiguity in a society polarized between "real white people with gold money" and emancipated Black communities. This ontological insecurity permeates her sensory world such as the "salt fish" diet (20) signals both colonial trade's residue and her family's economic decline, while the "torn towel" she clutches (20) becomes a frayed symbol of eroded European gentility. Her compulsive recitations of safety, "I am safe…the barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea" (24), operate as a performative act of symbolic defense against the historical instability imposed by Jamaica's colonial past. This "instability" denotes the enduring instability of post-Emancipation society, where racialized violence, economic dispossession, and cultural fragmentation leave marginalized subjects like Antoinette suspended in a state of existential vulnerability. Her words transform natural features into psychic comforts, landscapes layered with overlapping, contested meanings. A palimpsest, historically a manuscript reused after erasure, here describes how the cliffs and sea, while offering literal refuge, become overwritten with colonial-era narratives where the "barrier" signifies both physical isolation and the ideological boundaries of whiteness, which paradoxically exclude her as a white Creole in a post-slavery world.

Antoinette herself embodies the fragile temporal logic of identity as theorized by Ricoeur, who locates vulnerability in the tension between "sameness as permanence" and "selfhood as dynamic constancy" (Ricoeur 81). Her ritual attempts to fix the landscape as an eternal shield, a performative "promising" for stability which reflects a desperate grasp at binary between self and the Other that reduce identity to rigid sameness. Yet the landscape betrays this illusion, the cliffs and sea, while invoked as static barriers, silently retain the historical instability of her status as a white Creole, neither fully accepted by colonizers nor the colonized. Ricoeur's insight that fixing identity into permanence risks "rigidification" (81) thus materializes in the text. Antoinette's mantra, rather than securing coherence, exposes the "equivocation" within temporal selfhood, where the past's spectral presence undermines claims of safety.

It is this mnemonic vulnerability that drives Antoinette into Edward Rochester's patriarchal trap, a Faustian bargain for ontological coherence. Rochester, embodying imperial Britain's "pure" whiteness and patriarchal authority, becomes her flawed sanctuary against racialized liminality. There is a recurring invocation of "happiness" between Antoinette and Rochester crystallizes their opposed relationships to identity, power, and the performativity of security. When Antoinette tentatively echoes Rochester's toast, "To happiness" (*WSS*, 64), her words carry the weight of Ricoeur's "heritage of founding violence" (Ricoeur 82).Her counter-memory is inherently fragmented, mirroring Foucault's emphasis on history's discontinuous, plural nature (Foucault 161). Happiness, for her, is not a natural state but a precarious construct, conditioned by the colonial world's fractured memory. Her admission, "I am not used to happiness. … It makes me afraid" (*WSS*, 84), betrays a visceral awareness that societal definitions of "happiness" are intertwined with the same racial and gender hierarchies that have rendered her existence vulnerable. For Antoinette, happiness is synonymous with the illusion of "safety" she previously chanted to the cliffs and sea, a fragile shield against the inner of her Creole identity, neither fully white enough for Rochester's "like a king, an emperor" (67) world nor accepted by the Jamaican society around her.

When Rochester weaponizes "happiness" as a colonial-patriarchal mantra "promising her peace, happiness, safety" (*WSS*, 70), while Antoinette's fearful response, "I am not used to happiness. … It makes me afraid" (84), exposes this narrative's violence. Happiness, as defined by Rochester's manipulating tone, codifies the power relations between him and Antoinette as Foucault (39)attributes to French writer Donatien Marquis de Sade's works, there is a discursive space where "rational order is linked to an order of pleasures", and subjects are positioned within a "constellation of bodies" disciplined by continuous, explicit language. Rochester wields language as a tool of symbolic domination, constructing a seamless discourse that erases Antoinette's subjectivity while enshrining his authority as the absolute speaker. His repeated promises of "happiness" are not expressions of intimacy but acts of discursive colonization, mapping her existence onto the colonial archive's "monumental history" (Foucault 161) that reduces her to a docile object of possession. This language, Foucault might argue, is "continuous" even as it moves between rhetorical registers from tender vows of Rochester, "I kissed her fervently, promising her peace, happiness, safety" (*WSS*, 74) to dismissive detachment "Tears nothing! Words—less than nothing, As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing" (84-85) because it remains anchored in his unchallenged position as the subject who speaks for her, not with her.

His love promises to overwrite her stigmatized Creole identity with the legitimizing stamp of English domesticity while she unwittingly participates in her erasure, mistaking colonial romance for salvation.

ii). The Awakening of Antoinette's Creole Subjectivity

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester's retrospective confession to Jane operates as a Foucauldian exercise of counter-memory in reverse, a strategic reconstruction of history to consolidate patriarchal and colonial authority. By narrating his past in the third person perspective, Rochester dissociates himself from the violence embedded in his colonial exploits the arson, and imprisonment of Bertha Mason, reframing his actions as justified. "You never felt jealousy, did you, Miss Eyre? Of course not: I need not to ask you; because you never felt love"(*JE*, 235). "During the moment I was silent, Miss Eyre, I was arranging a point with my destiny..... I wish to be a better man than I have been, than I am" (*JE*, 236). This narrative sleight-of-hand aligns with Foucault's notion of memory politics, where dominant discourses sanitize historical violence through selective remembrance. Rochester's meticulously curated speech transforms his colonial crimes into a seemingly tragedy of fate, thereby eliciting Jane's sympathy while erasing Bertha's agency. His manipulation of memory extends to the portrayal of Grace Poole as the madwoman's keeper, a calculated misdirection that obscures Bertha's Caribbean identity and reduces her to a Gothic specter.

Jane's susceptibility to this narrative stems from her traumatic childhood, which conditions her to identify with figures of suffering. Her admiration for Helen Burns, "the effluence of fine intellect, of true courage.....her thin face, her sunken gray eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel" (*JE*, 110), functioning as an angel-like symbolic figure, becomes a psychological template through which she interprets Rochester's self-victimization. This emotional transference exemplifies how power operates through memory and symbols where Rochester's narrative colonizes Jane's subjectivity, positioning her as both witness and accomplice to his mythologized past. The madwoman in the attic thus functions not merely as a plot device but as a mnemonic void, a deliberate erasure of colonial violence that reinforces Victorian hierarchies of race and gender.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* disrupts Brontë's imperial narrative by excavating the silenced memories buried within Jane Eyre. Antoinette Cosway's first-person account enacts Foucault's concept of counter-memory, a subversive act of reclaiming history from the margins. Rhys dismantles Rochester's Eurocentric framing by recentering the narrative on Antoinette's Caribbean lived experience. The novel's opening line, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (*WSS*, 1) immediately destabilizes the colonial binaries of the pure and the impure, the civilized and the savage relations that Rochester's story relies upon.

Foucault's (74) assertion that "a memory engraved in stone which was capable of surviving the ravages of time; it now belonged to the legend it had once commemorated" finds stark illustration in the interplay between these texts." In*Jane Eyre*, Rochester's control over narrative memory about his past enacts what Foucault terms the disciplining of subjectivity. Jane's gradual internalization of his perspective, interpreting Bertha's screams as proof of inherent madness demonstrates how power operates through the internalization of dominant historical narratives. Her eventual union with Rochester hinges on her complicity in this epistemic violence, and her subjectivity is subsumed within his patriarchal-colonial framework.

In contrast, *Wide Sargasso Sea* stages a revolt against such disciplinary mechanisms. Antoinette's final act of arson, a reclamation of the fire Rochester attributes to her "madness", symbolizes the explosive potential of counter-memory. By burning Thornfield Hall, she transforms the Gothic trope of female insanity into a ritual of liberation. Rhys's narrative strategy mirrors Foucault's argument that resistance emerges from the reversal of a relationship of forces. Antoinette's flames literalize the destruction of imperial archives, allowing her to escape the discursive prison of "Bertha Mason".

The intertextual dialogue between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* illuminates the fraught relationship between memory, power, and subjectivity. Brontë's text exemplifies how colonial-patriarchal regimes construct legitimate subjectivities through narrative control, while Rhys's revision dismantles these regimes by amplifying silenced voices. Foucault's counter-memory theory provides a critical lens, Rochester's narrative discipline reveals memory as a tool of subjugation, whereas Antoinette's fragmented recollections weaponize memory to dismantle the very structures that seek to erase her.

Ultimately, Rhys's novel does not merely "correct" Brontë's omissions but exposes the violence inherent in historical narration itself. Antoinette's subjectivity, though fractured, persists in the gaps and silences of colonial discourse, but is a testament to the irrepressibility of marginalized memory. In this sense, both texts are haunted by the specter of what Foucault (120) discusses about writing when examined through its historical implications, inherently undergoes processes of forgetting and repression risks framing this perspective within a transcendental framework. Such a view inadvertently revives two interpretive paradigms, the religious notion of concealed truths demanding hermeneutic unveiling and the critical tradition's emphasis on latent significations, unspoken agendas, veiled ideologies, or submerged power dynamics that ostensibly necessitate analytical excavation. This dual logic transforms textual engagement into a ritual of decoding, where interpretation acts as both

revelation exposing obscured meanings that *Jane Eyre* seeks to bury, *Wide Sargasso Sea* exhumes, forcing us to confront the cost of historical amnesia and the radical possibility of remembering otherwise.

iii). Construction of "Lucy" in *Lucy:* Dialogic Counter-Narratives

In *Lucy*, the protagonist Lucy embodies a fragmented subjectivity shaped by what Foucault terms counter-memory and the dissolving force of symbolic dissociation, resisting both colonial nostalgia and bourgeois assimilation. Lucy's sardonic reflection on Columbus, "It was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493. … A task like that would have killed a thoughtful person" (*Lucy*, 135), operates as a direct assault on the "monumental history" (Foucault 161) that enshrines colonial conquest as heroic. By mocking the act of naming, "rack his brain after he ran out of names honoring his benefactors", she exposes the violent arbitrariness of imperial symbolism, where geographical "great discovery" serves as an ironic euphemism for dispossession. This is a typical act of counter-memory where she refuses the colonial archive's sanitized narrative, instead resurrecting the "foul deed" (135) of her ancestral history, a term that collapses personal and collective trauma, framing her very presence on the island as a product of systematic violence, not divine providence.

The recurring word "Poor Visitor" (*Lucy*, 13-15) crystallizes Lucy's liminality, functioning as a symbolic fetter that both defines and excludes her. Bestowed by her white employers Lewis and Mariah, this label is a tool of discursive power, positioning her as a transient outsider in a society that weaponizes symbols of belonging. Yet Lucy's resistance lies in her refusal to accept its stabilizing function while others deploy "Visitor" to maintain racial and class hierarchies, she internalizes it as a marker of ironic detachment, a lens through which to critique the hypocrisy of her white employers' world. Her sharp observation that "in the history of civilization… there is no word on the misery to be found at a dining-room table" (75) dismantles the bourgeois myth of domestic harmony, exposing the symbolic order of "civilization" as a veneer for exploitation—a move aligned with Foucault's view of symbols as battlegrounds where dominant discourses are contested (Foucault 39).

Lucy's dual stance, avoidance of her own origins, "I had realized that the origin of my presence… was the result of a foul deed" (*Lucy*, 135) and sharp critique of white privilege, embodies Foucault's (161) "systematic dissociation of identity". She is neither the nostalgic "native" nor the compliant immigrant, and her identity exists in the gap between the colonial past's symbolic violence and the present's the racialized Other. When Hugh asks, "Where in the West Indies are you from?" (*Lucy*, 65), his question seeks to contain her within the neat categories of imperial cartography, but Lucy's attraction to him lies in the subversive potential of this very act of categorization where she recognizes the performative nature of such symbols, even as she navigates their constraints. Her oscillation between "great happiness" and "great disillusionment" (91) mirrors the discontinuous mutations of symbolic meaning happiness, like "Visitor" or "civilization," is a contested symbol, never neutral, always laden with the weight of historical power. By refusing to resolve these contradictions into a coherent narrative, Lucy becomes a living example of counter-memory, her identity a dissident performance that thrives in the fissures of dominant discourse neither fixed by her past nor subsumed by the present's symbolic order.

Iv) Nominal Duality of Lucy: From Victorian Mask to Colonial Scar

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* engage in a fraught yet fertile dialogue across time and space, interrogating the construction of female subjectivity within systems of colonial and patriarchal control. "As she reached adolescence, Kincaid began to withdraw more and more into the world of books, reading her favorites, like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, over and over. Books gave her 'the greatest satisfaction' she was to know during her difficult teenage years" (Paravisini-Gebert 6). Her life's journey and experiences have made her an influential figure in literature, with her works reflecting her Caribbean roots and personal growth. While Brontë's novel unfolds within the claustrophobic confines of Victorian Europe, Kincaid's text transposes these tensions to a postcolonial

context, exposing how the legacies of imperialism perpetuate psychological and cultural dislocation. Through their protagonists, both named Lucy, the texts enact a reciprocal interrogation of narrative authority, memory, and the performative constraints of identity, revealing how the act of storytelling becomes both a site of repression and resistance.

Brontë's Lucy Snowe embodies Victorian femininity's paradox through her name "Lucy", evoking light and purity, collides with "Snowe", signifying coldness and detachment. This nominal duality mirrors the Victorian time's demand for women to be both visible as ornamental objects and emotionally inert to maintain social order. Lucy's steady and composed demeanor, "I, Lucy Snowe, am calm" in chapter 3 of the novel, functions as a performative mask, a textual strategy to dissociate from the emotional risks of direct self-assertion in a society that punishes unmarried, intellectual women. This fragmentation echoes Foucault's "systematic dissociation of identity" (Foucault 161), where the self is reduced to a collage of socially acceptable roles to survive. This narrative strategy finds its echo and inversion in Kincaid's Lucy, a Caribbean domestic worker in 1960s America, whose first-person voice bristles with unresolved anger against the cultural amnesia imposed by her colonial education. While Brontë's Lucy buries her letters and emotions to maintain a veneer of respectability, "And, now, I remembered my letter, left on the drawers with the light. This precious letter! Flesh or spirit must be defied for its sake" (*Villette*, 254), Kincaid's Lucy confronts the violence of being severed from her Antiguan heritage, her name itself a colonial imposition that mirrors Rochester's renaming of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Both Lucys navigate worlds where their inner lives are rendered illegible, Brontë's through Gothic metaphors of burial and haunting, Kincaid's through the visceral imagery of displacement and linguistic rupture.

Kincaid's Lucy weaponizes naming as a site of resistance. The protagonist's anglicized name, imposed by colonial education, becomes a palimpsest of cultural erasure. When the protagonist Lucy reflects, "Lucy, a girl's name for Lucifer. That my mother would have found me devil-like did not surprise me, for I often thought of her as god-like, and are not the children of gods devils? I did not grow to like the name Lucy—I would have much preferred to be called Lucifer outright—but whenever I saw my name I always reached out to give it a strong embrace" (*Lucy*, 153), the name "Lucy" ceases to be a neutral identifier but embodies the violence of colonial assimilation. Unlike Brontë's Lucy, who curates her identity through third-person detachment, Kincaid's Lucy rejects nominal passivity. Her refusal to romanticize "Lucy" as a symbol of Victorian propriety, echoing Antoinette's resistance to "Bertha" in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, transforms the act of naming from a tool of discipline into a gesture of defiance.

Brontë's gothic imagery in *Villette*, the ghostly nun buried alive in the convent garden, serves as a metaphor for repressed female agency within patriarchal structures. The nun's spectral presence externalizes Lucy Snowe's psychological confinement, her buried life literalized through architectural containment. Yet this gothic device remains rooted in individual pathology, reflecting Victorian anxieties about female autonomy rather than systemic critique.

Kincaid recalibrates this trope in *Lucy* through the figure of the protagonist's mother, whose letters from Antigua haunt Lucy like colonial ghosts. These letters, "After I read her letter, I was afraid to even put my face outside the door. The letter was filled with detail after detail of horrible and vicious things she had read or heard about that had taken place on those very same underground trains on which I traveled" (*Lucy*, 21) suffused with negative maternal expectation and cultural nostalgia, become relics of a past Lucy both mourns and resents. Unlike Brontë's nun, whose entombment signifies personal tragedy, Kincaid's haunted epistles expose the collective trauma of colonial displacement. The mother's voice, simultaneously nurturing and oppressive, mirrors the duality of colonial education where a force that alienates Lucy from her Antiguan heritage while demanding filial gratitude.

The motif of naming, central to both texts, underscores the intersection of identity and power. Kincaid's Lucy, when Mariah presents daffodils to Lucy, oblivious to their symbolic resonance as relics of British imperialism, a reference to Wordsworth's poem taught in colonial schools, the moment crystallizes how postcolonial subjectivity is shaped by violent intersections of memory and cultural appropriation. Conversely, rejects the colonial baptism implicit in her Anglicized name, which serves as a constant reminder of her displacement. Her refusal to sentimentalize her past, "Mariah, mistaking what was happening to me for joy at seeing daffodils for the first time, reached out to hug me, but I moved away, and in doing that I seemed to get my voice back" (*Lucy*, 29), subverts Brontë's ambivalent nostalgia, reframing the "buried life" not as a tragic metaphor but as an active resistance to imperialist historiography. Kincaid subverts this paradigm which Lucy's migration to America is no accident but a consequence of colonial economic exploitation, and her fraught relationship with her employer Mariah exposes the racialized undercurrents of coincidence.

The "dead nun" (*Villette*, 490), a metaphor for repressed female agency, is reimagined in *Lucy* as the protagonist's mother, whose letters from Antigua become suffocating relics of a past Lucy both mourns and resents. Kincaid transforms Brontë's gothic into a postcolonial critique in which the true horror lies not in individual madness but in the systemic erasure of colonial histories, where the motherland's ghostly presence perpetuates a cycle of cultural schizophrenia.

Both novels deploy coincidence as a narrative device to interrogate agency within constrained worlds. In *Villette*, the contrived reunions that Lucy stumbles at Madame Beck's school, and the improbable encounters with the de Bassompierres underscore the limited avenues available to women in a rigidly stratified society. These coincidences, however, are framed as miraculous, reinforcing the notion that female survival depends on patriarchal benevolence or sheer luck.

In this intertextual exchange, *Lucy* emerges not merely as a response to *Villette* but as a Foucauldian counter-memory, exhuming the colonial anxieties buried within Brontë's text. Kincaid's protagonist, like Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, refuses to be specialized, and her narrative disrupts the colonial archive by insisting on the materiality of displacement. Brontë's philosophical musings on reason and feeling, rendered as abstract dialectics, are reconfigured in *Lucy* as visceral struggles against the epistemic violence of colonial education. The "buried life" in both texts thus becomes a palimpsest, Brontë's repressed Victorian femininity overwritten by Kincaid's postcolonial critique, each layer exposing the fissures in the other.

Ultimately, the dialogue between these texts reveals the enduring tension between storytelling and survival. Brontë's Lucy Snowe, for all her narrative control, remains a prisoner of her reticence, her story constrained by the very conventions it seeks to critique. Kincaid's Lucy, in contrast, wields fragmentation as a tool of resistance, her disjointed narration mirroring the fractured identities produced by colonialism. In their interplay, these novels illuminate how the act of writing the Self whether through third-person detachment or searing first-person candor, becomes a radical assertion of presence against systems that seek to render certain lives illegible.

4. Conclusion

Caribbean Neo-Victorian narratives, steeped in the insurgent potential of Foucault's counter-memory, unravel the colonial and patriarchal webs that entangle female subjectivity. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* dismantle the Victorian canon's symbolic order, not to correct its omissions but to expose how colonial logic reduces Caribbean women to spectral Other", Antoinette's fractured identity, suspended between cliffs of racial liminality and Rochester's hollow promises of "happiness", mirrors Lucy's defiant renaming of herself as both Lucifer and survivor. These texts fracture inherited symbols—madness, silence, domesticity, transforming them into tools of resistance. Madness becomes prophecy; silence, an archive of unspoken trauma; and fire, a ritual of liberation.

By weaponizing colonial semiotics, Rhys and Kincaid rupture linear histories, revealing identity not as static essence but as a palimpsest. Each act of remembering, Antoinette's flames engulfing Thornfield, Lucy's sardonic dismissal of daffodils, rewrites imperial scripts. Fragmentation here is not defeat but rebellion. It is a refusal to be sutured into the colonial archive's sanitized narratives. Through counter-memory, these authors reclaim the power to reassemble identity from the debris of power, proving that even the most violent erasures leave traces. In their hands, memory ceases to be a relic, it becomes a revival of past Victorian characters.

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