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The Other Astrological Conflict in Chaucer's Wife of Bath: 'Contrarius' Mercury and Venus...
The Other Astrological Conflict in Chaucer's Wife of Bath: 'Contrarius' Mercury and Venus

Mirror, Mirror: The Faulty Mirror in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and George Eliot's Adam Bede

"All Opposites Contained and Reconciled": Merle Hodge's Crick Crack, Monkey and Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones

by
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The Other Astrological Conflict in Chaucer's Wife of Bath: 'Contrarius' Mercury and Venus

Abstract

This paper argues that Alisoun's astrological comments about Mercury and Venus illuminate and explain her contradictory and contrary relationships with her five husbands.
The children of Mercurie and of Venus
Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;
Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,
And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.
And, for hire diverse disposicioun,
Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.
And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat
In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,
And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.¹

Although some critical attention has focused on the Wife of Bath’s reference to Mercury and Venus in her Prologue, for Chaucer’s most extended reference to Mercury in all of his works, there has been surprisingly little criticism. Most Chaucerian criticism on astrology in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue has instead focused upon the Wife’s references to Venus and Mars. The criticism that has focused on the Wife’s Mercury-Venus reference has either used the passage as evidence for the construction of rather speculative astrological charts for Alisoun or as proof of the disharmony existing between clerks and women.² I argue that Chaucer was using astrological terms to explain Alisoun’s contradictory ways in her relations with men. In the Mercury-Venus passage, Alisoun states that Mercury, the planet of wisdom and science, is at odds with Venus, the planet of love and desire. Where Mercury’s influence is strongest, Venus is inhibited and where Venus’s influence is strongest, Mercury is inhibited. By referring to Mercury and Venus in such a way, Alisoun is stating that where learning rules, loves suffers and where love rules, learning suffers. In her Prologue, Alisoun’s
actions reinforce this statement. Alisoun becomes living proof of the contrary relations between Mercury and Venus. She reveals herself as a child of Mercury in her relations with her first three husbands, where her learning dominates. In contrast, love dominates in her 'Venerien' relationships with her fourth husband and, especially, with her fifth husband, Jankyn, the clerk. In her Tale, on the other hand, Alisoun creates a story illustrating the ideal meshing of Mercury and Venus, learning and love.

Traditionally, Mercury is associated with education, wisdom, and communication while Venus is associated with love, pleasure, and desire. Mercury and Venus do not work well in the same spheres. B. F. Hamlin clarifies this astrological concept: "At the point of exaltation a planet most easily expresses its qualities; at the point of depression, which is exactly opposite the point of exaltation, the planet is most inhibited." Thus, in an area where learning (Mercury) is strong, love (Venus) is inhibited, and vice versa. As Ptolemy states: "Venus increases her own proper power all the more in Pisces has her exaltation in Pisces and her depression in Virgo. Mercury by contrast naturally is exalted, as it were, in Virgo and is depressed in Pisces." In her Prologue, Alisoun seems to base her astrological observations on Ptolemy. According to Ptolemy in Tetrabiblos, Venus rules over "happy marriage" and "the flesh"
while "Mercury of speech and thought" rules "the tongue." Ptolemy also divides the ages of man. During the age of Mercury, man "begins to articulate and fashion the intelligent and logical part of the soul, to implant certain seeds and rudiments of learning, and to bring to light individual peculiarities of character and faculties, awakening the soul at this stage by instruction, tutelage, and the first gymnastic exercises." During the age of Venus, "Venus . . . begins, as is natural, to inspire . . . an activity of the seminal passages and to implant an impulse toward the embrace of love. At this time particularly a kind of frenzy enters the soul, incontinence, desire for any chance sexual gratification, burning passion, guile, and the blindness of the impetuous lover." According to these definitions of Mercury and Venus, Alisoun is an example of a child of Mercury in her relations with her first three husbands and of a child of Venus in her relations with her last two husbands.

Of her husbands, Alisoun states that three were good and two were bad. The three good husbands were rich and old, but bad in bed. The two bad husbands were younger and inspired in her more passion and love. Alisoun seems to have taken advantage of her first three husbands, gaining lands and money. Her lack of love for these first three husbands allowed her to use her intellect and learning. In her dealings with her first three husbands, Alisoun is clearly
developed as a child of Mercury, as is revealed in her commentary on her vast experience, her mastery of texts, and her role as a teacher.

While her comments on Mercury and Venus make us wonder if we can intellectually master love, certainly, upon first meeting Alisoun, we believe that she has done so. Her vast experience in matters of the heart is stressed. In the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, the narrator tells us of the Wife of Bath that "of remedies of love she knew per chance, / For she koude of that art the olde daunce" (475-76). Alisoun herself tells us of her ability in absolutely mastering her first three husbands. According to her, the fact that she has had five husbands gives her enough experience to speak expertly on the topic of love and marriage.

Alisoun has even greater knowledge and learning on the topic of love and marriage. Her learning is not only experiential. She also possesses a fair amount of book-learning on the topic of love and marriage. Alisoun's knowledge of the written word regarding the relations between men and women is significant, even if somewhat inaccurate and prejudiced. In defending her multiple marriages, Alisoun refers to Jesus, Solomon, God's command to procreate, St. Paul, Lameth, Abraham, and Jacob. She uses book-learning and logic to prove that God could not have explicitly forbidden marriage. She also uses the Bible to illustrate that God does
not demand virginity, referring to St. Paul and Jesus, as well as God’s love for all things. Throughout her Prologue, Alisoun backs her views and experiences with book-learning. For instance, when she states that sexual organs were not made just for "purgacioun / Of uryne" (120-21) and for sexual identification, but also for the gaining of sexual pleasure, she backs her view with book-learning as she comments on Paul’s statement that a "man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette" (130).

Throughout her discussion on her first three husbands, Alisoun appears so learned and so confident that the Pardoner interrupts by stating "ye been a noble prechour in this cas" (165). Even though the Pardoner’s comment is humorous, Alisoun is acting the part of preacher and teacher. In the course of her Prologue, she tells us to learn from her. Quoting Ptolemy, Alisoun tells us to listen to her tribulations in marriage so that we may benefit: "Whoso that nyl be war by othere men, / By him shul there men corrected be" (180-81). She directly advises other wives: "Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde. / Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde" (225-26). As a part of her teaching, Alisoun gives an extended how-to performance. She teaches wives to be cruel to their husbands in order to get their way. Alisoun even illustrates how she taught her first three husbands what to say. As a means of gaining her independence, Alisoun tells her husbands: "Thou sholdest seye, 'Wyf, go wher
thee liste; / Taak youre disport; I wol nat leve no talys. / I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alys" (318-20). The wise Alisoun states "certein we shal yow teche / That it is fair to have a wyf in pees" (438-39). Alisoun argues convincingly that for peace to occur one must yield. Using her wit, a gift of Mercury, Alisoun convinces her husbands that since man is more reasonable than woman, it is the man who should give in to keep the peace.

Being in love with Alisoun, under the influence of Venus, her first three husbands are incapable of reasoning and wisdom. Alisoun, not being in love, as of yet uninfluenced by Venus, is the master of reason and intellect. Thus far into her Prologue, Alisoun remains a child of Mercury. She uses her experience, manipulates texts and language, and attempts to teach others. She does not regard herself as associated with Venus until she is in the midst of discussing her fourth and fifth husbands. Only after mentioning her fourth and fifth husbands does Alisoun connect herself with Venus, stating: "For certes, I am al Venerien / In feelynge" (609-10).

Beginning with her fourth husband, Alisoun's behavior changes. She loses the intellectual edge that has kept her in mastery over her earlier husbands. With the fourth husband, she describes herself as young, passionate, and fond of drinking, all typical characteristics of Venus. Instead of intellectually manipulating her way out of accusations of
infidelity, as she has previously done, she uses her drunken state as an excuse. Additionally, her fourth husband is unfaithful, angering Alisoun. In addition, Alisoun spends considerably less time and less dramatic energy discussing her marriage to her fourth husband. Based upon her brief description of her fourth marriage, she seems to have lacked the mastery she exhibited with her first three husbands though she is learned and experienced in matters of love. Why?

An examination of the connections between Alisoun's fourth husband and her fifth husband, Jankyn, may provide an answer. Both husbands are characterized by Alisoun as "bad" husbands. Over neither of her last two husbands does Alisoun have intellectual mastery. Early on in the discussion of these last two husbands, Alisoun explains that women want what they cannot easily have:

We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,
In this matere a queynte fantasye:
Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.
Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;
Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.
(515-20)

Could it be that she loved and desired both Jankyn and her fourth husband because she could not so easily master them? Given the relations of learning and love, Mercury and Venus, once she loves them, her learning and experience mean little. Where love rules, learning loses influence. Her relationship with Jankyn especially seems to illustrate the inability of love to grow where learning governs. Because Alisoun loves
Jankyn, her wisdom in love matters fails. Instead, the learned Oxford clerk, Jankyn, rules with his wisdom, to the dismay of Alisoun.

Alisoun does love Jankyn. Even though she readily admits that of all her husbands Jankyn was the cruelest and "the mooste shrewes" (505), against her better judgement she loves him best: "He koude wynne agayn my love anon. / I trowe I loved hym best" (512-13). She married Jankyn "for love, and no richesse" (526). Alisoun’s first mention of Venus occurs as she is discussing her love for Jankyn. Suddenly, the woman who has been claiming mastery over love through experience, quoting from books on the subjects of marriage and virginity, and successfully manipulating language to get her own way in marriage, is calling herself a child of Venus. She loses her money and land to Jankyn, a child of Mercury.

Jankyn acts like a child of Mercury, a lover of wisdom and science. He tricks Alisoun in the same ways that she had tricked her first three husbands. He gains all the lands and property that she has manipulated from her first three husbands. Like the once mercurial Alisoun, Jankyn does exactly what he wishes to do. Usually, his wishes revolve around reading from his "book of wikked wyves" (685). He preaches to Alisoun just as she had preached to her first three husbands. He forbids her to wander and to go on pilgrimages, always defending his position with references to his book. He quotes from Valerius Maximus’s *Facta et dicta*
memorabilia and the Bible. He tells Alisoun the stories of wicked wives, such as Eve, Sampson, Hercules, Socrates, Phasispha, Clitermistra, Amphiorax, Lyvia, Lucia, and Latimus—all being wicked wives or having wicked wives who cheat or kill their mates. Although Alisoun hates his preaching, Jankyn refuses to stop. Alisoun is not only hurt by Jankyn’s insults toward women, but she is also jealous of his book. Jankyn, as a child of Mercury, is more interested in his book of wicked wives, an anthology of anti-feminist and anti-matrimonial anecdotes, than his own wife.

While relating her discontent with Jankyn’s interest in his book, Alisoun describes the ‘contrarius’ workings of Mercury and Venus, commenting on the planets’ inability to work well when placed in the other’s area of expertise, just as the combination of learning and love are failing in her relationship with Jankyn. While she makes these statements about Mercury and Venus in a frustrated attempt to explain clerks’ antifeminist and anti-matrimonial writings, her reference to Mercury and Venus actually offers an explanation to her contradictory actions in her various marriages.

Alisoun is first presented and first presents herself as an expert in matters of love, full of wisdom. Yet, when she falls in love, all of her learning and experience fail her. When she can no longer argue and manipulate, she calls herself a child of Venus. In Alisoun’s relationship with Jankyn, she is more interested in books and wisdom and becomes the child
of Mercury, willing to beat his wife deaf for the sake of his precious book. A book causes Alisoun pain now that she is in love. Since learning as represented by Mercury and love as represented by Venus cannot get along, neither can Jankyn, child of Mercury, and Alisoun, child of Venus. The discontent between the two erupts. Alisoun, fearing that Jankyn would read from "this cursed book al nyght" (789), tears pages from the book and hits him. She falls to the floor as he hits her for tearing the pages. She accuses him of killing her for her land and hits him once more for revenge. In this passionate power play, something suddenly changes. Her rebellion against his rule seems to make Jankyn feel something for her. Not only does he return the management of the lands to her and allow her control of her own life and of his tongue, he also burns the book on her command.

Following the burning of the book, love flourishes between Alisoun and Jankyn: "After that day we hadden never debaat. / God helpe me so, I was to hym as kinde / As any wyf \ldots / And also trewe, and so was he to me" (822-25). Once the learning, wisdom, and books are removed from their marriage, Jankyn and Alisoun both act as children of Venus, interested in only love and desire.

Once the Wife of Bath’s Prologue is interpreted as the working out of a conflict between Mercury and Venus, learning and love, Alisoun’s Tale reveals itself in a new light. While it has long been regarded as a reinforcement of Alisoun’s
demand that a woman have sovereignty over her husband, the new focus on learning and love within the Prologue highlights the issues of learning and love in Alisoun's Tale. Her Tale becomes a fairy-tale creation of a world where learning and love coexist offering a fulfilling relationship between man and woman, a relationship unavailable to Alisoun in her world. In her tale, Alisoun can create her ideal world and her ideal couple. Her ideal world is a place "manye hundred yeres ago" (863) where elves and fairies roamed in a supernatural wonderland. Her ideal couple is the old hag and the knight, a couple representative of the peaceful coexistence of learning and love. In the Tale, the old hag lectures to the knight on the nature of true gentility echoing the preaching and teaching of Alisoun in her Prologue, as she quotes from Dante, Valerius, Juvenal and other clerks and refers to the lives of Tullius Hostillius and Jesus. The knight appears to learn from the old hag when he offers her sovereignty in their relationship, the thing that she taught him all women want.6 Thus, the knight is rewarded, as is the old hag, with youth, love, and fidelity: "And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende / In parfit joye" (1257-8). In this fairy-tale world created by Alisoun in her Tale, learning and love work harmoniously together as learning fosters love.7

Unlike the knight and the old hag in her Tale, Alisoun must always choose between learning and love. While Alisoun
is better off when controlled by learned Mercury, she is happier and more alive when she is controlled by passionate Venus. As is shown in her Tale, true happiness can come only when Mercury and Venus work together in harmony, a demonstration that the truest happiness come when neither learning nor love dominate, but when both are in balance.

End Notes


Pacific Coast Philology 21 (1986): 30-36, briefly refers to the Mercury-Venus passage to prove that Alisoun believes that clerks write lies against women. J. D. North, in Chaucer’s Universe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), responds to Hamlin and admits that his own attempt to construct an astrological chart for Alisoun is highly speculative. Like Hamlin, he uses the Mercury-Venus passage as a basis for the construction of Alisoun’s astrological chart. H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., in The Disenchanted Self (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), discusses Alisoun’s attempt to construct herself through an understanding of her horoscope. Of the Mercury-Venus passage, Leicester states that Alisoun is parodying the work of clerks and sees the astrology as men’s attempt to rule over women. Another discussion of Alisoun as a child of Mercury may be found in Carol Martin’s unpublished dissertation, "Mercurial Haeresis: Chaucer’s Hermeneutical Po-et(h)ics" (University of Notre Dame, 1993; available through University Microfilms, Ann Arbor).


4. Although Alisoun misquotes Ptolemy’s Almagest, Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos, Trans. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1940), is a probable astrological source for Alisoun’s astrological comments.

5. My argument is that in her first three marriages, Alisoun is clearly a child of Mercury. I view Alisoun as intelligent and learned, a mercurial character—preaching, teaching, and quoting from learned sources. Chaucerian critics continue to debate the intellect of Alisoun and her mastery of texts. There are those who view Alisoun’s intellect as limited, making her more a child of Venus. Chauncey Wood, in Chaucer and the Country of the Stars (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), for example, sees Alisoun as separate from the learned clerks, partly because of her knowledge of astrology: "For the pragmatic Wife, for whom experience is ‘right ynogh,’ astrology offered a chance to justify her ways, as did Biblical texts and traditional anti-feminist literature. The Wife’s knowledge of astrology and concern for her horoscope set her off against the clerks (like Chaucer himself), whom she disparages, and put her in the camp of those believers in divinatory astrology." (It should be noted, however, that according to Ptolemy astrologers were ruled by Mercury). Paul A. Olson, in "The Sect of the Wife of Bath and the Quest for Perfection," The Canterbury Tales and the Good Society (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), claims that Chaucer is

6. There has been some critical controversy over whether the knight actually learns from the hag or not. Some have seen the knight as static. For instance, P. Verdonk, "'Sire Knyght, heer forth ne lith no wey?': A Reading of Chaucer's The Wife of Bath's Tale," Neophilologus 60 (1976): 297-308, discusses the knight as an essentially unchanging and static character. Others argue that the knight is transformed by the old hag. Joseph P. Roppolo, "The Converted Knight in Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale," College English 12 (1951): 263-69, presents the view that the knight is indeed converted by the old hag's speech. Peter G. Beidler, "Transformation in Gower's Tale of Florent and Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale," Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange (Victoria, B. C.: U of Victoria P, 1991), goes as far as to say that a major difference between Gower's Tale and Chaucer's Tale is that Chaucer focuses on the transformation of the imperfect knight into a worthy man.

7. Others have discussed, as I do, the idea that the main focus of the Tale may not be on woman's sovereignty. Charles Owen, "The Crucial Passages in Five of the Canterbury Tales: A Study in Irony and Symbol," JEGP 55 (1956): 294-311, states that there may be a quest for love "operating on the instinctive level beneath the Wife's and her heroine's theories," because in the Tale the old hag, after winning sovereignty, offers it to her knight. Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," ELH 41 (1974): 1-25, argues that the Tale might reveal a secret longing other than mastery on the
part of the Wife, a longing for a "happy sexual relationship based on mutual love and respect."
Mirror, Mirror: The Faulty Mirror in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*

**Abstract**

This paper examines the mirror imagery in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Eliot's *Adam Bede* focusing on Jane Eyre’s and Hetty Sorrel’s interactions with mirrors and applying Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage.
Jane Eyre in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Hetty Sorrel in Eliot's *Adam Bede* are deceived and confounded by the reflections that they find staring at them as they gaze into the various mirrors that they encounter. Both face mirror images that seem to deceive and confuse them in their individual attempts to construct a strong and stable sense of self. Unfortunately, Jane and Hetty base the formation of their identities on inaccurate, illusory, and alienating perceptions of their mirrored reflections. When Jane looks into her mirror she sees an alienated and unworthy figure, while Hetty can see only a gentle lady in her mirror. Both fail to gain any accurate understandings of who they really are and how they really appear within their communities. Jane and Hetty's inability to accurately comprehend their true identity results from their belief in their faulty mirror images.

According to Jacques Lacan, an individual's first identification with his/her reflection in a mirror is the most decisive stage in human development. By recognizing (or misrecognizing) his/her image in the mirror, the infant becomes aware of his/her body as a whole, a totality. Although the infant experiences an initial stage of confusing the image with reality, the infant's awareness of the body as a whole is essential because, as Lacan explains, the mirror stage can be regarded "as a particular function of the 'imago,'" which is to establish a relation between the
organism and its reality."¹ When looking in the mirror, the infant assumes that he/she controls the image in the mirror: "The mirror image is held together, it can come and go with a slight change of the infant’s position, and his mastery of the image fills him with triumph and joy."² Of course, this confidence is faulty because:

the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as a ‘Gestalt,’ that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size . . . that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. Thus, this ‘Gestalt’ . . . by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the ‘I,’ at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination.³

The image mastered by the child is outside of the child: "He only sees his form as more or less total and unified in an external image, in a virtual, alienated, ideal unity that cannot actually be touched."⁴ The infant is alienated from the image in the mirror. "In Lacan’s view, the ego’s mastery of the environment is always an illusory mastery, as a result of the way it is formed at the mirror stage, and the human subject will continue throughout life to look for an imaginary ‘wholeness’ and ‘unity’."⁵

Jane Eyre in Bronte’s Jane Eyre and Hetty Sorrel in Eliot’s Adam Bede search for the imaginary wholeness described by Lacan. Both Jane and Hetty lack wholeness.
Like Lacan’s infant, Jane and Hetty are enchanted by their illusory mastery over their mirror images. Their ability to manipulate their mirror images keeps them searching for the imaginary wholeness throughout their lives. While both have gazed into their mirrors and gained an image of a whole self, metaphorically and literally, Jane is left alienated by the images reflected from her looking-glass and Hetty confuses the mirror image with reality. Jane and Hetty suffer from a faulty belief in the reflections of self created by their faulty mirrors. Jane perceives her 'self' as criminal, alien, and unworthy. She experiences difficulty in correcting this faulty perception. Hetty perceives her 'self' as potentially aristocratic, loved, and worthy. Hetty suffers from her inability to operate within the reality of her situation and station.

I. Jane Eyre: "All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality" (46).6

Almost every time that Jane faces a mirror, the reflected image is colder and darker than reality. Jane faces four mirrors in Jane Eyre: as a child; after her engagement to Rochester; in a nightmarish visitation by Bertha; and on the morning of her wedding.

Jane’s first encounter with her mirror image occurs while she is living with the Reeds at Gateshead Hall. After being viciously attacked by John Reed, Mrs. Reed unjustly
sentences her to an indefinite incarceration in the red-
room. As Jane serves her time in the red-room, her eyes are
drawn to her frightening reflection in a looking-glass. She
is not pleased by the image she encounters in the mirror.
Her own image seems alien to her: "the strange little figure
there gazing . . . with a white face and arms specking the
gloom, and glittering eyes of fear" (46). Her reflection in
the looking-glass reminds her of "one of the tiny phantoms,
half fairy, half imp" (46), which surprised unsuspecting
travelers in the stories that Bessie told her.

As the novel develops, Jane becomes more and more
associated with this frightful fairy imagery. From her
first meeting with Rochester when she startles him as he
travels home, Rochester associates Jane with the fairy
kingdom.7 Rochester's references to the fairy, Jane's early
perception of her self, seem to validify her identity as
formed in the red-room at Gateshead. That illusory identity
will haunt her through most of her life, making her feel
alien, frightful, and strange.8

Jane's alienation from her reflection as it appears in
the red room is understandable. Her life at Gateshead has
not been happy. She has been treated as an alien. From a
young age, Jane has received only insults, never praise.
She is told that she is worse than the servants because she
does not earn her keep. Others refer to her as an orphan, a
criminal, and a vicious animal. In the red-room scene, Jane is even imprisoned like a criminal. Although she fails to recognize her reflection in the mirror, it is a self created by those around her at Gateshead Hall. Jane’s image of her self is forever influenced by this negative image, developed at Gateshead and viewed in the red room’s mirror. As Jane searches for an identity, a wholeness, she never fully escapes from the mirror image she encountered as a child in the red room. The mirror has gained control of her identity.

Jane’s feelings of loneliness, inferiority, and unworthiness do plague her throughout the novel. Following Rochester’s confession of love and offer of marriage, Jane’s weak sense of perception of self may seem to transform itself through Rochester’s love into a positive perception of self, but Jane’s confidence is fleeting. The morning following Rochester’s confession of love, Jane looks into the mirror: "While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect and life in its color; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fountain of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple" (286). While Jane’s reaction to her mirrored image seems positive and transformed, especially in contrast to the mirror image at Gateshead, I must disagree. Shortly after experiencing
this positive sense of self while looking into the mirror, Jane reacts resentfully to Rochester's playful comment that Jane is "Soon to be Jane Rochester" (287). Jane becomes fearful and upset at Rochester's comment. The same Jane who has just been admiring her self in the mirror states, "Don't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess" (287). Jane's sense of a worthy self is fleeting. Jane still lacks a solid sense of self. While, on the one hand, Jane's retort shows that she is less willing to accept the identities imposed by others, the emotion of her response indicates how precarious and unstable her self image is. Here Jane quickly regresses to her poor self-image formed at Gateshead in her initial confrontation with the mirror.

In the next mirror scene, Jane sees the other Mrs. Rochester in the looking glass. But she does not see the ghastly Bertha Mason Rochester clearly until Bertha looks into the mirror, Jane's mirror: "I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass" (311). Jane first sees Bertha, the other Mrs. Rochester, as she looks into her mirror. As Jane gazes into her own mirror to examine Bertha, she describes what she sees as "fearful and ghastly to me . . . discoloured . . . savage" (311). This savage creature tears the extravagant wedding veil into two halves and tramples on the remains. Jane can be associated with the frightful creature that she
sees in the mirror wearing her wedding garments. A definite connection is formed between the identity and actions of Jane and the identity and actions of Bertha, the other Mrs. Rochester. When Jane sees Bertha's visage in the mirror, she is really examining her own features, her inner self, or, at least, Jane is examining what she perceives to be her inner self."

Jane's perception of Bertha's reflection in her looking-glass makes Jane view herself as more alien and unworthy. Bertha has been responsible for numerous crimes throughout Jane's stay at Thornfield. She is so alien and unworthy that she must be locked on the third floor, similar to the locking of the young Jane Eyre in the red-room. After seeing Bertha, Jane acknowledges that "for the second time in my life -- only the second time -- I became insensible from terror" (312). Her first insensibility from terror here recalls her confrontation with the mirror in the red room at Gateshead.

Jane's feelings of inadequacy continue. As she dresses for the wedding that will transform her into Mrs. Rochester), Jane, for the fourth time, is forced to look into a mirror: "I saw a robed and veiled figure so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (315). As in the red-room, Jane here views the other in the mirror as alien. At Gateshead, Jane was raised with the
belief that she was evil and unloved, a vile criminal, lacking any worth. Although she is no longer perceived in this way by those around her, she cannot escape this early mirror image of her self. She cannot conceive of her self as Mrs. Rochester -- aristocratic, loved, and worthy. Yet, Jane Eyre eventually becomes Mrs. Rochester. Although she cannot perceive of her self in such a way, life as the aristocratic, loved, and worthy Mrs. Rochester becomes her reality, her identity.

In the end, Jane’s failure to construct an independent, coherent identity results largely from her inability to correctly conceive of her self. Much of her difficulty in constructing a self develops from her misrecognition of her mirror self. Jane comes to believe that she is what she perceives she is when looking into her mirror. She sees her self as alien, unworthy, and criminal. When she can no longer accept the misrecognized mirror image of her self, she marries Rochester and adopts his identity instead of forging her own. In a sense, she has escaped the prison of one mirror, her actual mirror, for an identity constructed through her interactions with another mirror, namely, Rochester. Trapped and misled by the reflections from the mirrors surrounding her, Jane never attains any independent identity that she searches for.

II. Adam Bede: "The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed;
the reflection faint or confused"

(Adam Bede 221).^{12}

While Jane perceives of her self as lowly and unworthy and is raised, Hetty Sorrel in Eliot's *Adam Bede* perceives of her self as aristocratic, loved, and worthy, her real self, her identity, as defined by the world around her, becomes one of a criminal, alien, and unworthy character.

While Jane could not imagine becoming Mrs. Rochester, Hetty Sorrel can see her self only as Mrs. Arthur Donnithorne. While Hetty encounters as many mirrors as she possibly can (any reflective surface will do), she gazes into a mirror on three particular instances in *Adam Bede*: in her bedchamber; before Arthur's birthday celebration; and after receiving Arthur's letter. Hetty's mirrors are as distorted as Jane's mirror.

Regardless of the inaccuracy of her mirror's reflection, Hetty gazes joyfully into any reflective surface available, much like Lacan's gleeful child upon reaching the mirror stage: "Hetty Sorrel often took the opportunity . . . of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces" (117). Hetty looks at her reflection in the oak-table, pewter dishes, and, even, the hobs of the grate. Very vain, very egotistic, Hetty is fascinated by her mirror image. Her glance into a mirror is her opportunity to master her identity.

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Hetty is so fascinated by her mirror image because she is unhappy with her reality. In gazing into the mirror, Hetty attempts to escape her reality by controlling her image. Like Jane, Hetty is an orphan. She is misunderstood and belittled by Mrs. Poyser and the rest of the Poyser family. Yet, Hetty seeks to be more than a servant or one of the Poyzers' own children. Although the Poyzers have taken care of Hetty, Hetty feels no attachment to them. She never connects her identity to the Poyzers, instead Hetty identifies with the aristocratic Arthur Donnithorne. Her egotistical, aristocratic identity is created as she admires her beauty in the looking-glass. Hetty uses her preoccupation with daydreams and mirror-gazing to create an identity and a place in society.

Ironically, the actual physical condition of her mirror reveals more about Hetty's identity and situation in life than her perception of her image in her mirror. One of Hetty's mirrors is described as an old and handsome mirror while the other is described as having blotches and being stuck in one position allowing Hetty "only . . . good view of her head and neck" (194) -- such a mirror does not allow her much control over her mirror image. The old, handsome mirror "had probably been bought by the Poyser family a quarter of a century before, at a sale of genteel household furniture" (194). While Hetty wants to see her self as an
aristocrat, the physical description of her mirrors reveals that she is no more than a dependent on an average farm family. The mirrors' physical condition reveals Hetty's identity as a poor farm girl in the Hayslope community.

The fact that the physical condition of Hetty's mirrors consistently illuminates the reality of Hetty's circumstances often upsets Hetty as she attempts to reconcile the difference between the mirror and her perceived image: "A queer old looking-glass! Hetty got into an ill-temper with it almost every time she dressed" (194). Hetty's disappointment with her self and her standing is displaced to the mirror. Instead of further scrutinizing her mirror image as it appears in the mirror or reconciling the state of the mirror with the sense of self she gains from the reflection of her self from the mirrors' glass, Hetty blames the mirror.

Nonetheless, Hetty is a determined and "devout worshipper" of her own image (194). To this end, she owned a small, unblotted looking-glass as a further attempt to control the image in the mirror, mastering her identity. As she gazes into her looking-glass, she attempts to make herself look like a picture in Miss Lydia Donnithorne's dressing-room. As she admires her beautiful image, she senses "an invisible spectator whose eyes rested on her like morning on the flowers" (195). Arthur Donnithorne is that spectator. As Hetty looks into the mirror, she is certain
that Arthur would never allow her hands to coarsen from buttermaking. Arthur "would like to see me in nice clothes, and thin shoes and white stockings" (196). As she gazes into her mirror, Hetty creates her place in Hayslope society as Mrs. Arthur Donnithorne: a lady who would "ride in her coach, and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk, with feathers in her hair and her dress sweeping the ground" (196-197). Completely identified with the image she has created, Hetty struts across her room "in her coloured stays and coloured skirt, and the old black lace scarf round her shoulders, and the great glass earrings in her ears" (197). In every imagining, "she is the central figure, in fine clothes; Captain Donnithorne is very close to her, putting his arm around her, perhaps kissing her, and everybody else is admiring and envying her" (199). This is the self that Hetty seeks to create.

Hetty's next look into her mirror occurs as she prepares to attend Arthur's birthday feast. As Hetty gazes "at herself in the old speckled glass" (294), the narrator stresses Hetty's difficulty in admiring herself in such a poor mirror. Hetty looks into the old speckled glass because "that was the only glass she had in which she could see her neck and arms, for the small hanging glass she had fetched out of the next room ... would show her nothing below her little chin" (294). Thus, Hetty has difficulty in attaining any sort of an accurate, complete view of her
self. Like Lacan’s infant who is fooled by an illusion of control when looking into the mirror, Hetty cannot control the mirror image. The mirror controls her.

Hetty’s excitement with Arthur’s gift of the pearl, gold, and garnet earrings leads Hetty into another mirror-world fantasy. As she stares into the mirror, she gets lost in her deluded identity: "already she lives in an invisible world of brilliant costumes, shimmering gauze, soft satin, and velvet, such as the lady’s-maid at the Chase has shown her in Miss Lydia’s wardrobe: she feels the bracelets on her arms, and treads on a soft carpet in front of a tall mirror" (296). Hetty is incapable of accurately perceiving herself. As she gazes into mirrors, she inaccurately reads her identity. Her misinterpretation of the reality surrounding her will cause her great sorrow.

In Hetty’s last mirror scene, she begins to face the consequences of her inability to correctly perceive her reality. In her final mirror scene, Hetty reads the letter that Adam delivers from Arthur. In the letter, Arthur explains his error in his love for her. Arthur attacks Hetty’s concept of herself. While she has seen herself as a princess gliding through rich, extravagant worlds, Arthur writes that it would be wrong for him to marry her. According to Arthur, Hetty "can never be happy except by marrying a man in your own station" (378). Worse yet, Arthur warns Hetty that if they married "you would soon
dislike me, because there would be so little in which we should be alike" (378). Hetty's own sense of identity has been so intertwined with Arthur's identity that the letter leaves her identity shattered.

While the narrator describes her "reflection . . . in the old dim glass" as "a white marble face with rounded childish forms, but something sadder than a child's pain in it" (378), the narrator comments that Hetty saw nothing: "Hetty did not see the face -- she saw nothing" (378-9). Hetty, the ultimate mirror-gazer, sees nothing in the looking-glass. Her identity has been destroyed by Arthur's letter. Hetty has never accepted that she is an orphan being cared for by a farmer relative and his family. She has perceived her self as a princess. When Hetty looks into the mirror again, she sees misery: "she caught sight of her face in the glass; it was reddened now, and wet with tears; it was almost like a companion that she might complain to -- that would pity her" (379). With this statement, the reader realizes that Hetty still does not have an accurate picture of herself. By continuing to look inward, Hetty believes that she can handle her crisis without anyone's assistance. The remainder of the chapter describes Hetty's refusal to turn to Dinah for help and her decision to leave Hayslope: "Any affection or comfort Dinah could have given her would have been as indifferent to Hetty this morning as everything else was except her bruised passion. She was only thinking
she could never stay here and go on with the old life" (381).

Throughout the rest of *Adam Bede*, Hetty's mirror remains dim and inaccurate. Her insistence on caring for herself and her determination to return to Arthur and to her old delusional fantasies lead to her tragedy. The "shattering of her little dream-world" (379) shatters as easily as a mirror shatters. Hetty created her identity in a dream-world based upon faulty perceptions of the self because of her over-reliance on a faulty mirror. While Hetty had dreamt of living the life of a glorious Mrs. Donnithorne, she becomes in reality what Jane had perceived herself to be -- criminal, alien, and unworthy. Hetty becomes a monster capable of killing her child.

III. Conclusion

Throughout their lives, Jane and Hetty face mirrors and attempt to gain control of their identities through mastery of the mirror and assimilation of its images. In their pursuit of self, both leave their places of security and familiarity. By leaving, they hope to find more stable and secure identities than the mirror-based images that both have sought to control. Jane believes that she is running from the faulty image of Mrs. Rochester to an identity of her own. Hetty believes that she is running toward an identity as Mrs. Donnithorne. Both are mistaken. At the
end of Jane's journey, she becomes Mrs. Rochester. Hetty ends her journey, not as Mrs. Donnithorne, but as a criminal exiled from Hayslope. Like Lacan's infant, they experience joy at the illusory mastery of the mirror image, but pain at their inability to translate the mirror images into an accurate and controllable sense of self.

Although Jane marries Rochester and becomes Mrs. Rochester, she never manages to build a strong, sufficient, and independent identity. Instead, she becomes Mrs. Rochester, enmeshing her identity with his as she describes herself as "absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh" (476). While Jane finds an identity through her discovery of family and her inheritance of money, she rejects this life at Marsh End to return to a debilitated Rochester. Jane revolts against the alienated self image created in her mirror, but accepts an identity reliant upon Rochester.

Hetty's journey is also unsuccessful. Instead of forging an identity, throughout her journey, Hetty continues to believe in the unrealistic images of self seen in her faulty mirror. Hetty's journey leads to her destruction. Her quest for a life as Mrs. Arthur Donnithorne, her mirror image, leaves her further alienated from any stable, realistic identity and lacking a place in her community. Although Hetty somewhat redeems herself through Dinah's
influence by becoming a confessing sinner, she remains isolated from the community and probably confused with her own identity, making her grab at religion a grab in desperation. If Hetty finds a sense of self, it is one of an unworthy, unloved, criminal, alien.

The mirror remains illusive and inaccurate throughout *Jane Eyre* and *Adam Bede*. Jane and Hetty both suffer from their belief in the accuracy of the mirrors' reflections, failing to gain any secure sense of self.16 Both rely to heavily upon the mirror as a source of self-knowledge. Both overestimate their ability to control their identity through mastery of the mirror. Both are misled by what they see in their mirrors. While Jane gains the identity presented in Hetty's mirror world, Hetty develops into Jane's earlier mirror identity. Jane's belief in the negative self-image seen in a faulty mirror forces her to accept the image created for her by another, namely Rochester. Having never escaped the mirror, Hetty fails to create an accurate, livable sense of self. She is transported from Hayslope and left to die in a strange land.

**End Notes**


4. Benvenuto and Kennedy, 55.

5. Ibid., 61.


7. As the novel progresses, Jane’s sense of self becomes further confused by Rochester’s complex perception of her, especially his perception of her as Mrs. Rochester. In a sense, Rochester can be viewed as another mirror for Jane. Often, she sees herself as he sees her. Her association with Rochester forces her to attempt to balance the otherworldly and frightful fairy image with the image of a respectable Mrs. Rochester. In the end, Jane chooses Rochester’s reflected image of her as Mrs. Rochester.


9. Jennifer Gribble, "Jane Eyre’s Imagination," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 23.3 (1968): 284, has noted that Jane’s reflection in the red-room’s mirror reflects her position at Gateshead: "Jane’s imagination, playing on this sharply isolated image of herself, reveals to her the essential nature of her position at Gateshead." William R. Siebenschuh, "The Image of the Child and the Plot of Jane Eyre," *Studies in the Novel* 8.3 (1976): 308-09, reflects further on Jane’s low standing at Gateshead: "She is unwanted and unloved. She is conscious of ‘physical inferiority’ and, ‘dispensed from joining the group,’ of social inferiority . . . . The literal child, of course,
grows and becomes Jane Eyre -- pupil, governess, and ultimately the wife of Edward Rochester. But the acute sense of loneliness, physical and social inferiority, her need to be loved -- all these fears and the despair felt in childhood -- will follow her throughout the book. They are ghosts which must be banished before the adult Jane can be happy and the novel can be satisfactorily resolved." Although I agree with Siebenschuh's estimation of Jane's standing in the Gateshead community, my paper questions whether Jane ever escapes the ghosts that haunt her and becomes happily resolved.

10. Cynthia A. Linder, *Romantic Imagery in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte* (New York: Barnes, 1978), 50, argues that this particular gaze into the mirror illustrates the "transforming power of happiness, in which plainness is not changed into beauty, but is transformed by a radiance coming from the soul." I disagree with Linder. Jane's feelings of confidence are too quickly shattered to signify "a radiance coming from the soul." Instead, Jane seems to have been drawn into believing a pleasing reflection of the mirror in her search for self. As usual, the image and her control over it is fleeting.

11. Bertha Rochester can be interpreted as Jane's double or another mirror image. Many critics have commented upon the relationship between Bertha and Jane. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 359-360 "Bertha . . . is Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead . . . . What Bertha now does . . . is what Jane wants to do." They argue, along with some others, that Bertha Mason Rochester, the other Mrs. Rochester, is a double for Jane, often acting out Jane's repressed passions. For instance, Peter Grudin, "Jane and the Other Mrs. Rochester: Excess and Restraint in *Jane Eyre,* " *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 10 (1977): 145, sees Bertha as a "projection of Jane's own dark potentials." Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Bronte's 'New Gothic'" in Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr., eds., *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), 118-32, and Richard Chase, "The Brontes, or, Myth Domesticated, in *Forms of Modern Fiction,*" ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948), 102-19, both treat Bertha a Jane's repressed passion. Also, Robert K. Martin, "Jane Eyre and the World of Faery," *Mosaic* 10.4 (1977): 92, draws parallels and associations between Jane and Bertha, referring to them as "two sides of the same self."

13. Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone, "Self-Disorder and Aggression in *Adam Bede*: A Kohutian Analysis," *Mosaic* 22.4 (1989): 61, also discusses Hetty's discontent with her reality, stating that "Although Eliot blames Hetty for her flaws, her presentation of the harsh family and social conditions that lie underneath the surface of the Eden-like county of Loamshire shows that Hetty has been victimized by its inhabitants. She has been effectively excluded from the community of Hayslope from the time of her arrival." Hetty "has not been able to find an appropriate role in her family or community; her status is somewhere between that of the servants and the Poyser's own children." While I agree that Hetty is isolated from the community, I believe that Hetty isolates and alienates herself from the community of Hayslope. She does not want to believe that she is similar to those around her. Her belief in the images she views in her mirror have convinced her that she is superior to most of her equals in the Hayslope. She feels she is equal to a Donnithorne. Her child-like control over her mirror image is her one childish way to control her identity. Her mirror helps her to isolate herself.

14. Jeannette King, *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, & Henry James* (London: Cambridge UP, 1978), 72, comments that Hetty is "the outstanding example of pathetic tragedy in George Eliot's work . . . . she is denied the strength and wisdom which traditionally accompany tragic suffering . . . . There is no triumph in her suffering, for she does not sufficiently understand its meaning to rise above it."


16. On this point, I disagree with Gilbert and Gubar's reading of Jane. In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 364, Gilbert and Gubar state that Jane "wanders, starving, freezing, stumbling, abandoning her few possessions, her name, and even her self-respect in her search for a new home . . . . And like the starved
wanderings of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*, her terrible journey across the moors suggests the essential homelessness -- the nameless, placeless, and contingent status -- of women in a patriarchal society. Yet because Jane, unlike Hetty, has an inner strength which her pilgrimage seeks to develop, 'kind angels' finally do bring her to what is in a sense her true home, the house significantly called Marsh End . . . which is to represent the end of her march toward selfhood." While Jane's march to Marsh End begins a march toward selfhood, Jane's abandonment of her life at Marsh End combined with her return to Rochester seems to suggest something else.
"All Opposites Contained and Reconciled": Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*

**Abstract**
This paper examines the struggles of Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Selina in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as they attempt to contain and reconcile the opposites that they encounter in their search for self.
In Paule Marshall's "To Da-duh, in Memoriam," the conflicted narrator comments that she admires her grandmother because "she was both, both child and woman, darkness and light, past and present, life and death—all the opposites contained and reconciled in her." Marshall's narrator, like Tee in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Selina in Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, seeks to contain and reconcile the opposites presented in her life. As Tee and Selina come of age, they must not only deal with all of the normal adolescent trauma. Tee and Selina must also struggle to contain and reconcile the opposites that occur in their lives, opposites of 'child and woman, darkness and light, past and present, life and death.' In their struggle to grow and to mature in a world pregnant with opposition, both Tee and Selina realize that to find their own place they need to escape the homes in which they have been raised. But, for Tee and Selina, the creation of an independent identity is complicated by racial and classist issues. This paper examines the struggle of these two characters as they attempt to contain and reconcile their oppositions in a search for self. Both Tee and Selina must also come to terms with the oppositions in their homes and their communities. Ultimately, both will discover that they must escape their homes. Yet, what both are attempting to escape, in actuality, are societies that exhibit and develop prejudiced attitudes and behaviors.

While coming-of-age is difficult regardless of
circumstances, Tee’s growth is further complicated by the early, unexpected death of her mother, her father’s abandonment of her, and the prejudicial nature of her island society. The racial tensions and class conflicts existing in the society are emphasized in the hostility between her two primary caretakers, her Tantie and her Aunt Beatrice. Tee’s constant exposure to the issues of race and class in society as well as in her own household influence her internalization of the conflicts as she grows to maturity, for as Tee’s world is highly judgmental of her based upon her "ordinaryness" and her "niggeryness," so she grows judgmental of her surroundings, of her family, and of herself. Hodge’s novel of formation examines the development of prejudice and self-loathing in a poor black child as she matures in a racist, classist society, a society where as Mrs. Harper describes it people would "scrape-up outa the rubbish-truck to sharpen they gran’-chirren nose."

Ultimately, Tee’s search for self forces her away from her island home, Trinidad, to the foreign land of England.

Tee must escape Trinidad because of the racist and classist conflicts that she continually encounters which insult and degrade her. Tee learns as Aunt Beatrice preaches, in Trinidad, "the darker you are the harder you have to try" (Hodge 83). Mrs. Wattman tells Tee that she is "one of those who will never get very far" (Hodge 98). Eventhough Tee performs as a superior student she "was given up as a hopeless case, as thick-skulled as was to be
expected" (Hodge 97) when compared to the lighter-skinned Carol. Eventually, Tee feels disgust that her father's darkness has disfigured the pure features of "the Great White Ancestress" (Hodge 81) on her mother's side:

I began to have the impression that I should be thoroughly ashamed; for it seemed to me that my person must represent the rock bottom of the family's fall from grace. Sometimes when I was alone in the living room Elizabeth Carter's undistinguishable portrait grew features, a pair of eyes that frowned angrily and a mouth that pursed together with disapproval. (Hodge 82)

Yet Tee's greatest exposure to race and class tensions occurs not in the larger island community, but within her own family, in the war between her Tantie and her Aunt Beatrice.

More than any other factor in the island community, Tee's move from Tantie's loving home to her Aunt Beatrice's house harms Tee in her search for a secure and confident adult self. After living with her Aunt Beatrice for just a short time, Tee is no longer certain or comfortable with an identity, as she had once been comfortable in her home with Tantie. Aunt Beatrice changes her perception of her situation. Aunt Beatrice, as well as those in Aunt Beatrice's world, constantly criticize Tee for her dark color and provincial ways as illustrated by Aunt Beatrice's comments on her "niggery-looking dress" (Hodge 77) and her way of eating "with bowl and spoon" (Hodge 95). When Tee moves to her Aunt Beatrice's house to attend St. Anne's, she is snubbed by Aunt Beatrice, her cousins, her teachers, and
her classmates. With some encouragement from her Aunt Beatrice, Tee begins to perceive Tantie as "a woman with no culture, no breeding, no sense of right and wrong herself" (Hodge 95). Tee begins to blame Tantie for her dark color and low-class ways. Being rejected for her color and her class, Tee begins to reject others based upon their color and class, seen in her rejection of her childhood Indian friend, Doolarie, of her favorite childhood foods, and of Carnival which she comes to remember as a time of being "packed into that ridiculous truck with all those common raucous niggery people and all those coolies" (Hodge 86). Despite the pains caused by her color and class, Tee herself is becoming a racist and a classist:

At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not having let Auntie Beatrice get us in the first place and bring us up properly. What Aunt Beatrice said so often was quite true: how could a woman with no sense of right and wrong take it upon herself to bring up children. (Hodge 97)

Although Tee is "ashamed and distressed to find" herself "thinking of Tantie in this way" (Hodge 97), she realizes that there is no returning to the comfort and community that she felt when she was first living with Tantie. Tantie's house had been a home, someplace where she had felt love, but Aunt Beatrice's racist and classist influence, illustrated in her arrogant and ignorant treatment of Mrs. Harper and the shopkeepers at Canapo, has alienated her from Tantie. The proof of her alienation from Tantie can be seen in Tantie's visit to Aunt Beatrice. Upon learning that
Tantie will be visiting, Tee realizes: "There was no chance of warding them off and who were 'them' I suddenly thought" (Hodge 105). Throughout Tantie's entire visit, Tee sits horrified and alarmed in Aunt Beatrice's drawingroom.

But, if Tee feels uncomfortable in Tantie's world, she also feels uncomfortable in Aunt Beatrice's world, where she is constantly being made to feel unworthy and disgraceful:

I wanted to shrink, to disappear. Sometimes I thought I would gladly live under the back steps with Dash, rather than cross their steps all day long. I felt that the very sight of me was an affront to common decency. I wished that my body could shrink up and fall away, that I could step out new and accepted. (Hodge 97)

A major source of Tee's alienation from her community and herself is her discovery that she has nowhere to turn, no real home. Tee envies:

people who were making their way home, unalteringly, without dragging their feet, without even thinking which way their home lay and what their home was like, and they would unlatch their front gates and walk up their front paths without even noticing their front gardens or the fronts of their houses and they would be opening their front doors, even still without a thought for what would be greeting them when they got inside. They were enviable people. To think that I had once been like them, making my way home day after day without my feet thinking where they were taking me. (Hodge 99)

Without a home or any reasonable sense of self, Tee feels that she has no place in Trinidad. Thus, she is happy to escape to England.

Throughout Crick Crack, Monkey, England is perceived as a promised land. First, in a practical sense, as the promise
of financial gains. Both Tee’s father and Mikey have traveled north, to England or America, to improve their circumstances in life. But, beyond Tee’s purely practical reasons for desiring to leave Trinidad, she has developed a distorted heavenly notion of England: "Various kindly and elderly folk had assured me that my mother had gone to Glory. And now at school I had come to learn that Glory and the Mother Country and Up There and Over There had all one and the same geographical location" (Hodge 30). In Tee’s young mind, England has become heaven, a place where she can wash away her black sin by crossing the wide, wide water explained in a hymn that she learned as a child:

Till I cross the wide, wide water, Lord  
My black sin washed from me,  
Till I come home to Glory Glory, Lord  
And cleansed stand beside thee,  
White and shining stand beside thee, Lord.  
(Hodge 30)

When she is finally called away from her island home of Trinidad to her father’s new home in England, Tee does gain immediate respect within the island community, as if she will, in some way, wash away her black sin. As Tee herself states, after hearing that she was to go to her father in England it was as if she had "suddenly inherited a title" (Hodge 109). Yet, regardless of this new-found respect, and in a way, because of it, Tee must leave Trinidad, a place where Tee feels only a sense of alienation from the community surrounding her and from herself: "Everything was changing, unrecognizable, pushing me out. This was as it should be, since I had moved up and no longer had any place
here. But it was painful, and I longed all the more to be on my way" (Hodge 110-11).

In a novel of formation, the ultimate goal is the resolution of the self. As a child grows and learns, the child becomes a whole and functioning adult. Hodge’s main concern in Crick Crack, Monkey is the resolution of Tee’s character. But, ultimately, Tee does not appear successful in creating a strong identity. Tee’s lack of a solid identity is illustrated by Tee’s names. After she moves into Aunt Beatrice’s house, Tee becomes Cynthia. At the end of Crick Crack, Monkey, Tee is somewhere between these two names, looking for a third. Separated from her roots, Tee never learns her African name, the name of her great-grandmother. At the end of the novel, a very conflicted Tee is seeking escape from her difficult and contradictory life on the island. Although one may argue that Tee’s move to England is a positive action, it is debatable. Tee’s move to England appears a desperate escape. While she has finally been presented with an opportunity to fulfill her desire to disappear from the island world, there is little hope that she will be successful once she reaches England. In the end, Tee remains a conflicted figure.

Hodge’s title, Crick Crack, Monkey, hints at her unresolved state. "Crick crack" is a statement made when someone is telling a story or stretching the truth, seen in Ma’s nancy stories and in the chorus following Manhatt’n’s story of being stateside. "Monkey" can be traced to a
comment made early in the novel by Tantie about Aunt Beatrice's attempt to appear superior: "monkey can't see 'e own tail" (Hodge 2). Tee is like Aunt Beatrice. She is attempting to appear superior, but, unlike Aunt Beatrice, Tee "see 'e own tail" (Hodge 2). Like the monkey who "break 'e back on a rotten pommerac" (Hodge 13), Tee is likely to get hurt, unable to escape her own feelings of inferiority and self-loathing no matter where she tries to hide. In Crick Crack, Monkey, Hodge creates a novel of formation where a child becomes aware of her black sin and is offered little positive hope of ever feeling cleansed.

While Tee comes of age and escapes her coming-of-age world, leaving Trinidad for England, Selina seeks the opposite solution to the same problem. Selina seeks to abandon her adolescent world in New York for the island life of Barbados. A glimpse into Selina's world in Brown Girl, Brownstones gives us some idea of the likelihood of Tee working out her childhood traumas in England. Brown Girl, Brownstones reveals that Selina experiences the same oppositions in New York City that Tee faces in Trinidad as Selina grows up in the midst of the Barbadian immigrant experience.

In Brown Girl, Brownstones, Selina faces a dichotomy similar to the one faced by Tee in Crick Crack, Monkey. Like Tee, the opposites that Selina must reconcile in an attempt to become a whole and resolved individual are introduced to her through her two primary care-givers, her
mother and her father. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Selina’s parents express in a brutal, complicated, and tangled way the same opposing tensions existing within the West Indian immigrant community in New York City where "white children on their way to school laughed at their blackness and shouted ‘nigger.’" Like Tee, Selina must as their child, Selina is placed in the center of this tension existing between her romantic, lackadaisical father and her practical, upwardly-mobile mother. Their opposites, their tensions mirror and reflect the tensions existing within the West Indian immigrant community. In discovering a sense of self, Selina must come to terms with these contradictory forces, these opposites, that combine in her as she searches for a place to call her home.

At first, Selina is her daddy’s little girl. She is always concerned with pleasing him, always enchanted with his romantic and impractical dreams. Deighton is all silk shirts and glamour, "one that was carefree and uncaring, that loved the tumult and glitter around him" (Marshall 37). Unlike her mother, Silla, Selina believes that her father is capable of all the wild plans that he imagines. Selina believes her father when he says that playing the trumpet will bring him fame and fortune: "Once I get started I gon make 'nough money. Then these Bajan with their few raw-mouth houses will see what real money is . . . . Everybody gon say: 'Deighton Boyce is one man that makes good money and lives good . . . . That's the way a man does do things"
She falls in love with the beautiful, peaceful, and harmonious picture that he paints of Barbados (a very different portrait than the one painted by Tee of Trinidad in *Crick Crack, Monkey*) and is enthused with the prospect of moving to the island to live on her father’s land in the elegant house that he will build for her. Selina never quite manages to understand that her father is incapable of practical action. He falls under the sway of an evangelical preacher:

She did not understand . . . . She thought suddenly of Percy Challenor presiding like a threatening god. They were alike, he and Father Peace. They ruled. What was it that made her father unfit to do the same? Why was he the seduced follower and not the god . . . ? (Marshall 169).

Deighton, Selina’s father, is a dreamer and a follower, incapable of any practical, realistic action.

Thus, Silla and Deighton, Selina’s mother and father, are always at odds. For Silla is nothing if not hardworking, practical, and strong. She is the driving engine of the family, and, in a sense, represents the energy of the developing West Indian community in New York City at the time: "Only the mother’s own formidable force could match that of the machines" (Marshall 100). Unlike Deighton, Silla is not an impractical dreamer:

I tell yuh, to make your way in this world you got to dirty more than yuh hands sometime . . . . I read someplace that this is the machine age and its the God truth. You got to learn to run these machines to live. But some these Bajan here still don understand that--that Suggie and yuh father and them so that still ain got a penny to their
She lectures on the importance of hard work and the necessity of fighting for respect, money, and power.

As she is growing up, Selina is trapped between these two fiercely opposing forces—two opposites of great power that seem intent upon destroying one another. In her quest for self, Selina must manage to contain and reconcile these two violent and opposing forces. The power and violence existing between these two forces is illuminated in the relationship existing between Selina's mother and father. Silla and Deighton are constantly attempting to destroy one another. Tension fills the house from their attempt to live together as man and wife. This tension is most starkly illustrated in their battle over Deighton's land in Barbados. As Silla discusses her plans to sell Deighton's land, Selina visualizes Silla's words as "ominous birds, poised, beaks ready to rip her father" (Marshall 75). When Silla finally manages to sell the land through a series of manipulative moves, Deighton frustrates and angers Silla by wasting the money on extravagant gifts. In the end, after Deighton has abandoned the family to follow Father Peace, Silla succeeds in destroying Deighton by putting him on a boat back to his beloved island. He dies having "either jumped or fallen overboard" (Hodge 185) on his return to Barbados.

Selina's initial reaction to her father's death is an outright rejection of her mother along with all that her
mother stands for. Selina seeks to escape the force of her mother. She feels an alienation from her mother even as the narrator refers to Silla as 'the mother.' Selina feels the same alienation and contempt for the more ambitious element of the West Indian community, namely the Association. As she sits at an Association meeting, she feels painfully that she does not belong: "Why should she feel such loneliness and alienation among them when, after all, they were her people? Where was her place if not with them?" (Hodge 226-27). In an attempt to escape her mother, the community, and her feelings of alienation, Selina plans to manipulate the West Indian Association in order to win scholarship money. She will use this money to save herself and her lover, Clive, getting them to the island paradise, her father's island paradise.

In the end, however, Selina learns that she must come to terms with her mother and with what her mother represents. Selina begins to see that her mother lives in her as much as her father lives in her, if not more so:

    Everybody used to call me Deighton’s Selina but they were wrong. Because you see I’m truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of eighteen and was your own woman? I used to love hearing that.  
    (Marshall 307)

Following her first encounter with racism after the dance recital, Selina begins to marvel at her mother’s strength to endure in the prejudiced world in which she has had to live. Talking to Margaret’s mother, she:
looked up and saw her reflection in those pale eyes, she knew that the woman saw one thing above all else. Those eyes were a well-lighted mirror in which, for the first time, Selina truly saw--with a sharp and shattering clarity--the full meaning of her black skin. (Marshall 289)

Until her meeting with Margaret's mother, the meeting that made "every white face . . . be suspect" (Marshall 285), Selina remained ignorant of the attitudes that her mother has endured. She begins to identify with her mother and the other West Indians: "She was one with them: the mother and the Bajan women . . . How had the mother endured" (Marshall 292-93). She begins to admire the strength of her mother as well as the West Indian community surrounding her. When she does win the West Indian Association scholarship, she is torn as to what to do: "Scanning those . . . reflections and variations of her own dark face . . . suddenly she admired their mystery. No, not mystery . . . but the mysterious source of endurance in them, and it was not only admiration she felt but love she felt" (Marshall 302). Selina comes to learn that "love was the greater burden than hate" (Marshall 302). Yet, despite such strong feelings, Selina decides that she still must leave New York and search for her home, her own place.

Ironically, Selina leaves for the island home of Barbados to escape New York--the same kind of island home that Tee abandons in Crick Crack, Monkey for an opportunity in the affluent North. Although Tee and Selina come of age in two different worlds, the circumstances that they face are
similar. Both feel the pull of two worlds, one more native and one more sophisticated. In the end, like Tee, Selina must leave her family's home to find her home in a search for self. At the end of *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee has not contained and reconciled the opposites existing within her life. Instead, Tee has internalized the oppression that surrounds her. In the end, Tee is running away from her self and from her home by rejecting Tantie and loathing her self. It does not appear that she is running to a self or a home. While Selina seems to at least confront the oppositions that haunt her life, little attempt has been made to contain and reconcile those oppositions. Similarly, Selina has not done a thorough job of containing and reconciling the opposites that have existed throughout her formative years. Like Tee, who rejects vital parts of her self, Selina fails to recognize and validate the opposing forces that molded her.

End Notes


4. Missy Dehn Kubitschek, "Paule Marshall's Women on Quest," *Black American Literature* 21 (Spring-Summer 1987): 51, argues that the major opposing forces in Selina's life are not her parents, but, instead, Miss Thompson and Suggie:
"Miss Thompson and Suggie, as the work principle and the pleasure principle, comprise the truly opposed pair in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* . . . . Dispensing with the complexities of conflicting desires, Miss Thompson and Suggie develop the extreme possibilities of Scilla's dedication to work and Deighton's self-indulgence." I feel that Selina's mother and father play a much more important role than Miss Thompson and Suggie in presenting Selina with opposites that she must manage to contain and reconcile.


6. Leela Kapai, "Dominant Themes and Technique in Paule Marshall's Fiction," *College Language Association Journal* 16 (1972): 55: "At one level, *Brown Girl* . . . is the story of Selina's growing up, but on another level, it is also the story of 'any people undergoing fundamental change and disruption.' In the author's own words, 'It was a study of two opposing forces in life: the poetic as suggested by the father in the story and the practical and materialistic as symbolized by the mother and the necessity to reconcile, to balance these two forces is pointed up in the character of the daughter.'"
The Other Astrological Conflict in Chaucer's Wife of Bath: 'Contrarius' Mercury and Venus


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Chase, Richard. "The Brontes, or, Myth Domesticated." *Forms*


"All Opposites Contained and Reconciled":
Merle Hodge’s Crick Crack, Monkey and
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Cobham, Rhonda. "Revisioning Our Kumblas: Transforming
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Marshall, Paule. "To Da-duh, in Memoriam." The Heath
Biography

Tracey A. Cummings was born in Carbondale, PA, on November 3, 1970, to John and Anna Cummings. She was raised in the Lackawanna Valley. Ms. Cummings attended King's College in Wilkes-Barre, PA, where she earned a B.A. in English and graduated summa cum laude in 1992. She has presented her paper "'Upon a Scaffold Hye': Absolon as Herod" at the Sixteenth Medieval Forum at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. The same paper will be published as part of a collaborative article "Dramatic Intertextuality in the Miller's Tale: Chaucer's Use of Characters from Medieval Drama as Foils for John, Alisoun, Nicholas, and Absolon" in the forthcoming Volume 3 of the Chaucer Yearbook. She has also presented her paper "'All Opposites Contained and Reconciled': Merle Hodge's Crick Crack, Monkey and Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones" at the American Women Writers of Color Conference at Salisbury State University in Maryland. Ms. Cummings will receive her Master of Arts in English from Lehigh University in January 1995.
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