Jean Rhys' Portrayal of Self Narrative Experience in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

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Abstract:

Women in the contemporary age have been labeled as revolutionary and anti-traditional depictions of their existence. Jean Rhys (24 August 1890 – 14 May 1979) was a Caribbean novelist, short story writer, and essayist whose writings vehemently advocated women's modernist innovations and Creole civil rights. She is recognized for her post-colonial works which are primarily distinguished by their analysis of the quest for third-space identity, Creole Hybridity, and the impact of colonialism on them. Most of her writings are autobiographical and are regarded to be her life's reflection. Rhys through her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), henceforth "*WSS*" in quotations, portrays Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole woman and descendant of the colonizers, who is silenced and pushed mad in an attic. She is conflicted between her white Creole identity and her loyalty to postcolonial Caribbean black inhabitants. Rhys' Antoinette is considered as the marginalized standpoint of Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, a Caribbean bride who was portrayed as a sinister madwoman in her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847).

Rhys examines women question through *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as she depicts key feminist ideals that are still relevant to date. In that novel, Rhys explores fundamental concerns of women's liberty and autonomy, manifesting their discrimination and marginalization by patriarchy and their silence and suffering, further, attempting to deconstruct the imposed notion that women are the weak representation of society. Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* serves as both a patriarchal inscription and a challenge to male-dominated discourse and in many occasions of the novel, is linked to Rhys herself.

Wide Sargasso Sea by replies to the marginalization and exploitation of a Caribbean woman, ironically portrayed as the insane woman in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. Further, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she associates madness with the quest for identity, isolation, and suffering, as well as a fascination with oppressive behavior by colonists from England's patriarchal society.

Keywords: Colonization, Creole identity, Patriarchal, Women Oppression, Otherness, Racial discrimination.

الملخص:

تم تصنيف النساء في العصر المعاصر على أنهن صور ثورية ومعادية للتقاليد. جين ريس (٢٤ أغسطس ١٨٩٠ - ١٤ مايو ١٩٧٩) كانت روائيًا كاريبيًا وكاتبة قصة قصيرة وكاتبة مقالات دعت كتاباتها بشدة إلى الابتكارات الحداثية للمرأة والحقوق المدنية الكريولية. اشتهرت بأعمالها في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار والتي تميزت في المقام الأول بتحليلها للبحث عن هوية الفضاء الثالث، الكريول الهجين ، وتأثير الاستعمار عليها. معظم كتاباتها هي سيرتها الذاتية وتعتبر انعكاسًا لحياتها. تصورت جين ريس من خلال روايتها بحر سارجاسو الواسع (١٩٦٦)، أنطوانيت كوزواي ، امرأة كريولية بيضاء ومن نسل المستعمرين، التي تم إسكاتها ودفعها للجنون في العلية. إنها متعارضة بين هويتها الكريولية البيضاء وولائها للسكان السود في منطقة الكاريبي بعد الاستعمار. يعتبر الكاتبة جين ريس و أنطوانيت وجهة النظر المهمشة لبيرثا ماسون في رواية جين اير (١٨٤٧) لكاتبة شارلوت برونتي ، اللتي تم تصويرها على أنها سيدة مجنونة شريرة.

تقوم جين ريس ببحث مسألة النساء عبر روايتها بحر سارجاسو الواسع ، حيث تصورت المثل العليا النسوية التي لا تزال ذات صلة حتى الآن. في تلك الرواية ، تستكشف ريس الاهتمامات الأساسية لحرية المرأة واستقلاليتها ، مظهراً تمييزها وتهميشها من قبل المجتمع الذكوري وصمتها ومعاناتها ، علاوة على ذلك ، في محاولة لتفكيك الفكرة المفروضة بأن المرأة هي التمثيل الضعيف للمجتمع. أنطوانيت في بحر سارجاسو الواسع بمثابة ترفيض المجتمع الذكوري وتحدي للخطاب الذي يهيمن عليه الذكور وفي العديد من مناسبات الرواية ترتبط ريس بنفسها.

ترد رواية بحر سارجاسو الواسع على تهميش واستغلال امرأة كاريبية ومن المفارقات تصويرها على أنها المرأة المجنونة في العلية في رواية جين آير لشارلوت برونتي. علاوة على ذلك ، في بحر سارجاسو الواسع ، يربط ريس الجنون بالبحث عن الهوية والاغتراب والمعاناة والهوس بالسلوك القمعي من قبل المستعمرين من الثقافة الأبوية المحافظة في إنجلترا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعمار ، الهوية الكريولية ، الذكورية، اضطهاد المرأة ، الآخر ، التمييز العنصري

1. *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Third Space Identity Crises and Creole Hybridity

"'And how will you like that' I thought, as I kissed him. 'How will you like being made exactly like other people?'" (*WSS* 22). By the time *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966, critics and scholars had already set in motion identifying Caribbean literature as a growing body of literary canon of exceptional quality and few reviewers thought of Rhys as Caribbean until the release of this work. Judith Butler in her 2004 book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* argues that Rhys' Caribbean and colonial viewpoint is undoubtedly evident in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (134). Further, according to Helen Nebeker, Rhys' Creole heritage represents the context for her feelings of dispossession, un-belonging and identity crises within this novel (1).

Wide Sargasso Sea presents Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole lady and descendant of the colonizers, who is driven insane in a grotesque attic. She is trapped between her white Creole culture and her affinity with Caribbean's colonized, black inhabitants. Because her father was a slave master, black Caribbean community rejects Antoinette, and English expatriates belittle her because she is from the Indies, hence, Antoinette being trapped between two cultures, obstructs an intermediate area defined by both European and Caribbean cultural practices. She is defined as a white cockroach to the ex-slaves and a white nigger to the English, for that, she felt dispositioned, stating: "I frequently wonder who I am, where is my nation, where do I belong, and why was I even born at all" (*WSS* 85). Thereby, Antoinette discovers herself in a state of "in-betweenness" a term articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in his work *The Location of Culture* (1994) describing the hybrid identity. By bringing Caribbean cultural heritage into mainstream literary debate, Rhys not only calls Charlotte Brontë's representation of a Creole in *Jane Eyre* into question, but also demonstrates the importance of Caribbean cultural inheritance.

Jean Rhys objected to harsh portrayal of Bertha Mason, the Creole in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. She wrote to her editor Francis Wyndham about Brontë's depiction of the Caribbean Bertha Mason or Antoinette believing "that's only one side, the English side" (297). Instead, she desired to portray "the real story, as it might have been... a plausible story to make the whole smooth and inevitable" (153). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette or Bertha Mason responds to rumors about her mother by remarking, "There is always the other side [of the story], always" (*WSS*, 128). Per Jerome Bruner, the "real story" and "the other side" are delivered with the authority and authenticity of a first-person narrator, tempting readers into believing her account as the believable "truthful" version of what happened, and into interpreting the text as an accurate depiction of reality (9). Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* was a reaction to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) in order to give a glimpse to Bertha Mason, a Caribbean Creole who is kept in the attic and considered a madwoman by her English partner, Mr. Rochester. In Brontë's work, Bertha is weakened, Brontë's silence about Bertha's background urges Rhys to shatter the unsaid white Creole's identity in *Jane Eyre*, giving her a voice, which humanizes this degraded Creole. She supports Antoinette's search for identity while simultaneously questioning Western hegemonic conditions.

Rhys' heroine is originally Creole. The concept of Creole extends beyond black and white dichotomies, nor does it fall under either the black or white categories. In *Post-Colonial Study: Key Concepts*, Ashcroft et al comment that Creole has characteristics of both black and white races, in this way, Creole distinguishes itself from the black against white, African against European categories of identity and develops a new realm known as Creole hybridity or "third space" (57). Antoinette struggles from identity and individual existence confusion as a white Creole in Jamaica's West Island. She is trapped between purely white individuals and purely black people, without belonging to either group. The black people regard her as a hybrid, which they despise, but the British conquerors regard her as an alien or an outsider. This issue, as Yousef and Abu-samra believe, "leaves Antoinette caught between two cultures and never able to identify fully with anyone. Antoinette becomes the "other" who is unable to claim the English identity as her own, nor can she break from the complications of her ethnic background to create an independent self" (112). Khem Guragin in his 2015 article 'The 'Third Space' and the Questions of Identity in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*' portrays the status of Antoinette's Creole third space by stating that she is:

Neither fully accepted by the colonized black people nor by the white European colonizers. She continuously struggles to negotiate between the completely opposing expectations and spaces of black Jamaican and white European cultures. Consequently, Antoinette falls into a state of "in betweenness" or a "third space" (66)

In accordance to Silvia Panizza, Rhys disqualifies the notion of identity based on black and white, colonizer and colonized binary categories by placing Antoinette in a "third space" of a Creole identity. On the other hand, Rhys seeks to negotiate between two opposing cultures and find an acceptable space of tolerance for a new hybrid reality by placing Antoinette in a "third space" of a Creole identity (11). Helen Tiffin in her 1995 article 'Post-colonial Literatures and Counter discourse' argues that, "post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a

dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (95).

Moreover, Fann Oudah Aljohani claims that Antoinette has a hybrid position in these contexts, belonging neither to Dominican society nor to Western European culture. She is considered to be a Creole hybrid figure. Her situation does not fit into the Western binary categories of black/white, colonizer/colonized, and any attempt to comprehend her identity through the idea of subject/object position is futile (14). Rhys' identity, like Antoinette's, is highly volatile and complex; she lived in a hybrid society in which "she belonged to the aristocracy in her birthplace, yet in England she was a working class and an outcast as a Creole" (Savory 13). Rhys is urged to deconstruct Western literature by placing the Caribbean legacy to the forefront of the literary canon, she is keen on stating her reason towards responding back to Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in an interview with Hannah Carter, she comments:

I was convinced that Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it … why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature? I hadn't really formulated the idea of vindicating the madwoman in the novel, but when I was rediscovered, I was encouraged to do so. (Qtd in Nunez-Harrell 287)

For that, Jean Rhys was tormented by Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's novel's "crazy Creole heiress in the early nineteenth century" (Wyndham 6) is a product of an inbred, decadent, expatriate society despised by newly liberated slaves who shared their beliefs. Because she is a white Creole woman with no pure European ancestry, Antoinette is aware that her colonizing husband regards her as inferior. Ludin believes that her spouse realizes his father's dream of marrying a white Creole and inheriting a large quantity of money. as one of Rochester's letters to his father reveals: "All is well according to your plans and wishes." (*WSS* 46) He has no attachments to anything, not the area nor the girl with whom he is married. Rochester states: "

It was all very brightly colored, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry. When at last I met her, I bowed, smiled, kissed her hand, danced with her. I played the part I was expected to play. She never had anything to do with me at all." (*WSS* 46).

Creole hybridity, or third space does not provide a secure space for Antoinette to establish her identity. She is once again victimized by patriarchal oppression and a patriarchal dichotomy of male and female distinctions. Antoinette finds herself in a similar predicament as her creator, Rhys, who believes, "I would never be a part of anything … I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing" (*WSS* 124). Rhys liberates Antoinette by providing her a voice to tell her own narrative, allowing her to articulate and explain how she negotiates and validates her identity as a black Dominican woman in a white European culture. Antoinette suffers in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as she strives to position her hybrid identity in the face of social, cultural, and ethnic rejection. Antoinette's identity issue is exacerbated by a number of circumstances.

Arnold Shapiro in his 1968 article 'In Defense of Jane Eyre' indicates, the novel's title alludes to the protagonist's predicament, namely, drowning in the sea of identity and unable to reach either of the sea's two shores (686). The protagonist cannot traverse the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which runs between Europe and the Caribbean, so she's stranded in the middle, exactly like a ship caught in shallow water. The novel devotes a significant amount of time to the perennial themes of gender,

racism, and colonial politics. Ashcroft et al write that despite the fact that *Wide Sargasso Sea* appears to be a pathetic love story about a Creole woman going mad due to unrequited love in her marriage to an English man, a close postcolonial reading of the novel reveals several crucial cultural and political orientalist attitudes toward Creole people, Europe's alternative and potential "other" (50). Furthermore, the novel offers a counter-narrative to *Jane Eyre*'s dominant ideas on a Caribbean Creole, shedding light on the unsaid experiences and purposefully masked identity of a disadvantaged lady.

2. Women's Silence and Suffering, Female Question in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Gilbert and Gubar in their 1979 book *The Madwoman in the Attic* are describing women's position in patriarchal society and ask "What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are, as we have seen, both overtly and covertly patriarchal?" (45-46). They do not believe that women will be fully liberated until they are able to remove the limited protected patriarchal barrier. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys explores these fundamental concerns of women's liberty and autonomy, attempting to deconstruct the imposed notion that women are the other half of males. The doom of Antoinette is brought forth by patriarchal factors working together. She is devoid of any possessions. Rochester sneers as he whisks her away from the place of her dreams:

She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it. I'll watch for one tear, one human tear. Not that blank hating moonstruck face. I'll listen.... If she says good-bye perhaps adieu. Adieu, like those old-time songs she sang. Always adieu (and all the songs say it). If she too says it, or weeps, I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but mine, mine. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both. For me (210).

In this work, the system that suffocates the feminine soul is chastised and challenged. Woman is seen as a commodity in the logocentric society, to be sold and bartered for greater commercial objectives. Her aspirations, delusions, and disillusionments are no longer hers. For patriarchy's cavaliers, she is nothing more than a sexual object. She is the Other, whose screams and moans may be used to build patriarchal discourse edifices. Rochester steals Antoinette's maiden name (Jyothimol 18). Bertha, not Antoinette, becomes her new name, which she despises. She tells Christophine, her maid, "When he passes my door he says, 'Good night, Bertha'. He never calls me Antoinette now" (*WSS* 147). Later, when Antoinette is called, she resists because she knows she lives a life of deception and hypocrisy with Rochester. She says, "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else calling me by another name" (193). Antoinette is known for her simplicity, primal beauty, and spontaneity. Bertha is a formal English name that identifies her as the property of a stiff Englishman. Part two ends on a touching note, with Rochester taking Antoinette away from her vibrantly colored environment to a cold, unfriendly England, "She was silence itself" (*WSS* 222). The agents of patriarchy succeed in quenching the spirit of a natural being by rendering "Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty cloths, and her looking-glass" (235). The power to life has been taken away from this displaced person. Her wings have been clipped. Hatred and conflict have made her impotent, just like the burning parrot. "He tried to glide down, but his clipped wings failed him, and he crashed to the ground screeching" (51).

She, on the other hand, does not remain silent. Her shrieks and gothic laughter shatter the patriarchal and colonial mansion's foundations and repressive machinery, and their echoes and reechoes are repeated through generations in women's frantic pleas to be heard. (Jyothimol 18). The last section of the novel, when the plot intersects with *Jane Eyre*'s, is as Lorna Sage mentions, "a sustained feat of illusionism" (52), with Brontë's setting hollowed down into a realm of unreality, the solid mansion engulfed in Dominica-colored flames. Instead of being depressing and horrible, the conclusion is gloriously vindictive. With its shattering energy and intensity, this work is genuinely feministic in its final setting fire to the structure of patriarchy with everything that it represents (53). In this revisionary rereading of *Jane Eyre*, a marginal figure left unattended in the attic of a nineteenth-century gothic home with its enclosures returns to claim the narrative for herself.

Jean Rhys responds to the patriarchal narrative by rewriting the storyline, character, and structure, giving Bertha Mason a past and setting, humanizing her as Antoinette Cosway, and placing her in the Dominican Republic. In its description of suffering and the feelings of the unloved and ostracized, it is a work of uncanny insight and intensity. Jyothimol narrates that as a feminist expression of a woman's self and a challenge to patriarchy, this work is a huge achievement. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a famous feminist work because of the female discourse and the exaltation of the female spirit. Antoinette serves as both a patriarchal inscription and a challenge to male-dominated discourse. Jane Eyre's world is destroyed and deconstructed when she deviates from conformity expectations (191). *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a narration of patriarchy, making it a structure that dominates and overshadows women, making them unable to make their own decisions regarding economy, sexuality, mothering, or childbirth. To support such claim, Minakshi Kulkarni in her 2019 article "Feminism in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*" expresses that the novel is a system of oppression over the other gender that emasculates women's identities, skills, and potentials.

Women are given responsibilities to serve the guy and are left without a voice. They must give in to all of her male partner's whims. Dale Spender comments that throughout the novel, males appeared to have taken the categories of strength, reason, logic, and objectivity, among others, when partitioning reality within a patriarchal framework and then endowed them with positive worth. They also assigned women the qualities of frailty, irrationality, emotion, and subjectivity, giving them a negative value. These mutilating categories are constructed to depict the dichotomies and hierarchies that pervade the dominant group's world. Males require these separating categories in order to construct an unequal society and therefore preserve their dominance, hence, in reality, they are reliant on them (101). When women begin to encode their own meanings in their own register, all patriarchal hierarchical dichotomies may be overturned. Mr. Rochester, who is curiously never identified in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is the colonial and patriarchal oppressor who uses his authority to minimize Antoinette's frightening otherness.

In keeping with Andrea Masset (2019), Mr. Rochester excluded and silenced Antoinette in a variety of ways, finally making her invisible, muffled, and dying (42). Rochester's mistreatment of his wife, Antoinette, exposes the patriarchal society's hypocrisy, in which women are viewed as separate from and inferior to males. "This was Antoinette. It was easy to decline since she talked hesitantly as if she expected me to refuse." (*WSS* 59). Because Antoinette needs to fit her message

within the masculine code, it gets tilted to fit the patriarchal system. As a result, her message loses clarity and conviction, and she appears to talk hesitantly, knowing that no matter how hard she tries to adapt her meaning to the male realm, she will not be heard. Mr. Rochester's oppression towards Antoinette is unspeakably harsh, his behavior is not justified by all means when it comes to him having relations with other women only to drive her more towards madness. He constantly destroys her emotions, sense of self, and attachment to her home and people, driving her deeper into a state of utter alienation. Khem Guragain depicts that very matter by showing an instance of him having sex in the next room with Amelie, one of the black servants at their honeymoon house, which puts an end to all prospect of negotiating with him (80). Feeling utterly alone, Antoinette tries to assault Rochester with a piece of shattered wine bottle glass, giving Rochester ample reason to label her insane and imprison her in the attic of his English mansion. Rochester, thus Barbara L. Langston subjected Antoinette to several forms of violence. He separates Antoinette from her ancestral traditions, breaks her bond with her mother, and shatters her already damaged sense of identity (166). "Names matter, as when he wouldn't name me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out the window with her scents, her pretty clothes, and her looking-glass," (*WSS* 117). Antoinette knows her eventual destiny as a prisoner at Rochester's home in London is an illustration of a man's power over a woman. Antoinette's madness is the product of patriarchal oppression, not a degenerate inheritance.

Mezei writes "To prevent the false telling of her story by others, the lie, Antoinette must tell herself in the first person following the standards of narrative order," (197). Rochester's perceptions and ideals are identified as manifestations of the European male control structure that he thinks and behaves within. He is always striving to create a story that appropriates his need to dominate Antoinette in terms of class, sex, and race, and traps her in an attic. Antoinette, on the other hand, defies his quest for power by rejecting the scary name "Bertha":

Don't laugh like that, Bertha.'
'My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?'
'Because it is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha.'
'It doesn't matter,' she said. (*WSS* 81)

Kulkani pointed out that in this work, Antoinette's husband is referred to as Mr., but in *Jane Eyre*, he is referred to as Mr. Rochester, revealing a feminist perspective in which Jean Rhys stands with the oppressed heroine and does not give the patriarchal husband any name (136). Antoinette doubts her husband's devotion at one instance when they argue about Rochester spending the night with Amelie. "Don't you love me at all?" she says, to which Rochester responds emphatically, "No, I don't" (95). Such harsh comments make it impossible for Antoinette to feel loved or have happiness in her marriage. Such pronouncements, on the other hand, have a negative impact on her self-worth, driving her deeper into depression and rebellious fantasies. She is in a bad mood. We can observe Antoinette's mental state towards the conclusion of the story since she never had any healthy relationships with anyone. She recognizes that her marriage was not a healthy one, but rather one of convenience. She had high hopes for the marriage, but instead of bringing comfort, she received disappointment, a sense of emptiness, and marginalization.

3. Marginalization and Isolation in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Rhys, according to Phillip Brian Harper (1994), consistently places a marginalized character at the center of her stories, degrading an inherited narrative framework and undermining the principles that underpin it (233). Teresa F. O'Connor (1986) discusses that Rhys herself has a striking similarity to all of her main characters and has gone through situations comparable to those described in all of her works (35). As more biographical information became accessible, such critics like O'Connor began to use historical Jean Rhys as a foil for her own characters. As a result, in the goal of determining reasons for both, they frequently confused creator and creation. O'Connor further states:

Domination figure in Rhys's work as themes but they are symptoms and results of a deeper malaise … the dislocation and alienation that comes from having neither a true home, metaphorically and literally, nor a loving mother, which for many may be the equivalent-and no way of fabricating either. It was Rhys's mother's indifference to her which forced Rhys to become indifferent in return. It is her heroines' statelessness, homelessness and lack of familial and deep ties that lead to their malaise. (36)

Per Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's critical work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, responds to the marginalization and misrepresentation of a Creole Caribbean woman, ironicized as the mad woman in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, "Bertha has functioned as Jane's dark double" (184). Gayatri Spivak (1985)'s colonial study of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a strong reminder that *Jane Eyre* includes not just a feminist moral but also a repressed history of colonialism. In Spivak's opinion, Bertha Mason, the white Creole lady, is marginalized by Brontë in *Jane Eyre* to the point that she dwells on the boundary between human and beast (185). Here is Jane's direct recall of her first encounter with Bertha in *Jane Eyre*:

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards … whether beast or human being, one could not at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal … but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (321)

Rhys' inscription of Jane Eyre, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was published in 1966, in which its main character and heroine Antoinette/Bertha is the very character Brontë marginalized and called her mad. Hite (1989) claims, by focusing the plot on the character who is, in many respects, the most essential and necessarily accessory to the event, Rhys illustrates how social and narrative standards demand that some types of women be undervalued in order for other types of women to gain prominence. In the story, this tradition becomes a cause of significant strain (32). Bertha/Antoinette Cosway, is the most minor type of character in *Jane Eyre*, since, despite the fact that she is vitally important as a function, she must never be heard, in the sense of being recognized as having made substantial comments. She is, by definition, outside the symbolic order. Not surprisingly, given she is not a native Englishwoman, this offstage lay character is likewise socially marginalized. She is a West Indian colonial, much like Rhys. In Brontë's work, Rochester's depiction of her madness and badness is colored by the tale of her beginnings, to the point that madness, badness, and creole origins are all equal symbols for an inherent contamination that must be exorcized from the imaginative environment.

In the long run, Jean Rhys depicts what was previously marginalized and othered as a vital and dominating figure in her endeavor to give voice to the silent side, demonstrating the significance

of the perspective in which the margins may also become a center. Coral Ann Howells (1991) remarks, Coral Ann Howells remarks, "Rhys speaks from a self-consciously marginal position raising issues of gender and colonial difference in fiction of resistance which are always compromised by the conditions of female dependency" (58). In the long run, Jean Rhys depicts what was previously marginalized and othered as a vital and dominating figure in her endeavor to give voice to the silent side, demonstrating the significance of the perspective in which the margins may also become a center.

4. Madness and Insanity in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Madness is a common subject in many literary works, including Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Macbeth, and King Lear, but it is especially prevalent in Caribbean literature produced in English between 1959 and 1980. However, defining the word is not easy, especially when it comes to Afro-Caribbean and Creole texts written in English by various authors. These texts associate madness with multiple interpretations, portraying it in various ways in relation to various causes and causalities. Karolina Tennholt (2005) writes, "Madness can be viewed as both a disorder of the brain and a social phenomenon" (4). More importantly, according to Mohammed Azmat (2018), in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys does not limit the concept of madness to the aforementioned denotative and conventional meaning; rather, it appears to be broad in scope, encompassing psychological, neurological, and social connotations, more in line with the various concepts of madness held and expounded by various theorists and thinkers, like Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and R. D. Laing (1927-1989) (76).

While Mr. Rochester refers to Antoinette as "Bertha" in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, reminding us of Charlotte Brontë's monster-like depiction of her as a "mad ghost" in her famous novel *Jane Eyre*, both with respect to cultural differences and split self, it is ironically Rochester who is schizophrenic and abnormal in both ways, according to Nancy Harrison (1988), Antoinette's unique Creole beauty charms him, but his condescending Victorian upbringing keeps him away from her, prompting him to use his coercive power and control instead (128). He defies all temptations to submit to her alluring enchantment. The attractive status quo in his favor keeps him on his usual path of enslaving and oppressing her rather than becoming a slave to her dominating and alluring beauty. Despite all of his contemplation and planning to marry Antoinette only for financial gain, Mr. Rochester inadvertently creates a divided ego in two ways. First, despite his attraction to her captivating beauty and the beautiful Caribbean setting all around him, he goes against his own self and acts schizophrenically by denying any feelings of curiosity. He displays his condition of insanity in the frenzied manner described below:

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst. (*WSS*, 172)

Second, as O'Connor puts out, Mr. Rochester is intended to be superior to his colonial wife in every manner, based on his upbringing as a man in the strict Victorian English culture. However, when he is confronted with his wife's greater knowledge, who educates him about the beauty of the West Indies and almost convinces him rather than being educated and convinced about the glory and might have industrialized England, he develops an inferiority complex. This fills him

with paranoia over the subversion of his masculine identity, which is likely to impose a feminine identity on him (148-49). He manifests that in the following, “Her mind was already made up ... I could not change them and probably nothing would ... her fixed ideas would never change” (*WSS*, 94). While Rochester's behavior, as typical of the colonial mindset, represents his abnormality in terms of schizophrenia, that is, a split self, the Blacks exhibit what Tennholt (2005) refers to as “Collective Delirium” as a result of their suppressed national identity by the White colonizers who subjugated and oppressed them by establishing a status-quo based on the impression that the Blacks were less civilized, less educated and less human (7).

Letizia Gramaglia (2018) and other critics examined the correlation between madness and colonialism, with a special focus on the psychological disorders that “impact colonized people.” The lunacy of the Creole female colonists in *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be interpreted in a variety of ways. For starters, consider Foucault's definition of lunacy as a departure from a society's normative framework (8-9). Women are seen as deviating from the patriarchy-ridden societal norm of putting all power in males in a colonial and patriarchal social structure like *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rather, under such an extreme patriarchal societal setup, such an oddity as a woman's better knowledge is viewed as double deviating from the norm, implying that they are in a condition of madness. Elizabeth Abel (1996) views the issue as, “Power is distributed unevenly in Rhys's world. The significant men in her novels have jobs, money, and consequently the power to appropriate women and discard them” (170). To put it another way, women are viewed as misfits in a patriarchal power system, making them more susceptible and weaker than men.

Wide Sargasso Sea exemplifies Antoinette's departure from the patriarchal, colonial norm so clearly through her actions toward her husband, with the added identity of being a colonizer at the same time. As a result, even in the early stages of their relationship, when Mr. Rochester, a newly arrived alien from a conservative, strictly gender-based English society, discovers her possessing superior knowledge, even if it is about the West Indies and its beauty, he develops an irritating thought, perceiving himself as weak and inferior for being tutored by a woman. Mohammed Azmat (2018) similarly coins the fact that in reaction, Mr. Rochester tries to teach her about England, but she annoys him by continuing to be convinced of the West Indies’ greater beauty compared to the industrialized England (82). Mr. Rochester dehumanizes Antoinette to excuse his own arrogant and harsh treatment of her. He says:

Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! — as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. (*Jane Eyre*, 105).

This shows that madness is not always and only a clinical or strictly neurological problem; rather, the underlying reason of some mental disorders, dilemmas, delusions, and deliriums is insinuated by the harsh factors surrounding, implying that one might be driven insane by the cruel deeds of others. Mr. Rochester, for example, strips away Antoinette's individuality by dubbing her "Bertha," making her into a monster-like creature she refuses to reconcile with. Later, he takes her to England and imprisons her, completely alienating her and robbing her of her identity. As a result, Antoinette complains in a fascinating manner: “Names matter, like when he wouldn't name me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes,

and her looking-glass" (*WSS*, 180). Last but not least, her pitiful and frenzied state plainly demonstrates that she has gone insane. She has even lost the ability to identify herself in the mirror. She has entirely lost her sense of self.

Conclusion:

Wide Sargasso Sea is the masterwork of Jean Rhys, a Caribbean novelist who moved to Europe in her childhood. Within Europe, she felt marginalized due to the confusion of her hybrid personal identity. Within the novel, Rhys strives to express the difficulty of being trapped between two cultures and she experiences her Creole hybridity, in which she is unable to completely identify with either of the cultures. Same as Rhys, Antoinette's status as a Creole, or a hybrid daughter of Caribbean black and European white races, is one key part of her character in which she obtains contradictory societal signals about her entire identity.

The female protagonist, Antoinette, has been subjected to different attempts to weaken her identity and reinforce her silenced status in a patriarchal Western culture. Mr. Rochester, the patriarchal figure in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the colonial and patriarchal oppressor who uses his authority to eliminate Antoinette's threatening otherness. Moreover, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a response to the marginalization and exploitation of a Caribbean woman, who is depicted as the mad woman in the attic. She also links madness with the search for identity, loneliness, and suffering, as well as a preoccupation with repressive conduct by English colonials.

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